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Leaving Nazi Austria. (Hermann H. Kosak)
Foreword to the H. K. Diary 1940-1944

I was thirteen when Hitler came to Vienna on March 14, 1938.

Since anti-Semitism was common before he came, we were not surprised at the increase of anti Jewish sentiment.

I saw Hitler come into town. The streets were packed solid with people screaming for him! He came in a long convoy of cars that looked alike. He could have been in any of them. People screamed at each car. It seemed that the public had lost its mind.

For days people were hoarse from screaming. Those who were not were suspect.

Within three days, Jews were not allowed to own property. What's worse, we had lost our civic rights. Jewish businesses and homes were plundered, often by high school-age kids in Nazi uniforms called Hitler Youth.

Jews were rounded up, robbed, beaten and made to do demeaning labor, like scrubbing the street with hands or tooth brushes.

We found out about a roundup of male Jews in our neighborhood after it happened. For some mysterious reason, my stepfather and I had been spared. The victims were abused and send off to concentration camps (Dachau and/or Buchenwald). Our neighbor from across the street, Mr. Kartin, the butcher, was beaten to death, before the group was taken away, because, it seems he offered to share a cigarette with another prisoner.

Now we were ready to join the general exodus. People fled to surrounding countries, and of course, America. But Americans had created a very restrictive quota for Jewish immigration from Austria: One a day!

(At the time, there were over 100 thousand Jews in Vienna. It is save to assume that most wanted to get out.)

There was supposed to be a waiting list, according to when a visa was applied for. But soon it was rumored that the American Consul sold visas to the highest bidders. There was no sense for ordinary people with ordinary means to wait for theirs.

My stepfather had two sisters in Holland. Hilda and Sidonia. Both married. He and my sister left for Holland in June, arrived there safely and told us to come as soon as we could.

But mother and I had been raided in our apartment and our passports had been taken with what other valuables there were. Mother brazenly went to Gestapo Headquarters and ask our passports back. People who went there often disappeared and I was more than just glad to see her again. To my surprise, she managed to get our passports. We left shortly thereafter. Sneaked out of our place as if we were thieves. Got on a train to Aachen, hoping to cross into Holland from there.

However the Western Democracies had already closed their border to Jewish Immigrants.

We managed to stay at a small hotel in Aachen run by a friendly and sympathetic woman.

The Nazis let us cross the border after scrupulously searching us, and taking all the money from us, except 7 marks per person.

Knowing that we would be robbed at the border, mother left what money she had at the hotel room, just in case we would have to come back.

Sure enough, we did not get very far. As soon as the train stopped on the Holland side of the border, Dutch customs agents got on, checked our papers, had us get off and back to Germany.

Soon we were out of funds and convinced that we had to find a better way to cross the border. We had enough money to take the train to Frankfurt am Main. Went to the Jewish Community Social Services, and told them that we had gone broke trying to leave the country. All they could or would do for us is give us train tickets back to Vienna.

Now the only relatives we had left there were mother's oldest brother, the artist Victor and Tecia, his wife. The others had been able to get to Holland or Belgium. Aunt Mina had left for the USA. She had wanted to go there anyway, and had filed for a visa long before the Nazis took over. Her fiancé, a very nice man, was killed by the Nazis shortly before she departed. She must have been in a dreadful state of mind when she left.

Mother and I came back to Vienna with nothing but the clothing we wore, a nasty surprise for Victor and Tecia. They were working on getting out to France, and would try to leave for the US from there.

Never the-less, we stayed at their place while trying to obtain more traveling money.

Knowing that we were imposing on Vic and Tecia, we were not very comfortable with them. Mother was trying to make contacts and finding a place for us to stay. I was running errands for Vic and Tecia. Being in the streets was dangerous for Jews. I Stood in line for their exit visas one night from one till eight in the morning, when Victor arrived and took my place in the long waiting line.

I talked mother into letting me go back to Aachen by myself to find a way across the border. I would then come back and take her out of the country. After all, there had to be a way and I was going to find it.

Had a lot of self confidence. I got maps of Aachen, the Belgian-Dutch border, and Brussels. By now, my stepfather and sister had moved from Amsterdam to Brussels. Uncle Julius, Jacob, Simon and family were also there. Aunt Fritzi, Elise and Edith, who had made it to Amsterdam before the border closed, had left from there for New York.

All this was inspiring to me. On November 9th., I had been on an errand and was on my way back to Victor's when I saw a man being beaten by S.A. brown shirts. It was a vicious beating being photographed by a man with an American flag armband. The bloody pulp of the man, who according to those beating him was a Communist-Jew, was dragged to a pickup and thrown on it like a sack of potatoes. All this was being photographed.

I walked away from the scene sick to my stomach and noticed black smoke rising over nearby buildings. There was a large synagogue on fire.

Got back to Victor's safely, and from the window in his studio we could watch the fire, and the firemen who had come noisily with their fire engines, then climbed their tall ladders to the roofs around the burning building to pour water over adjoining buildings to keep the fire from spreading.

The next morning, while on the way to the Westbahnhof, the railway station, to get some information, I was arrested by S.A. stopping Jews to have them clear rubble from (another) completely burnt out synagogue. Worked there shoveling ashes and carrying charred beams into the street without a break, without food or drink, till it got too dark to do so. Listened to horror stories whispered by others who had been stopped like me to work. There must have been about twenty men. I am sure I was the youngest. Several S.A. stood around watching us and urging us on to work faster.

Heard about people who had been thrown from their apartment into the street. Several men insisted that children had been thrown into the Danube. I was glad, I did not have to see these things.

Spent the evening washing the soot and dirt off me. Ached all over.

Victor and Tecia finally received their visas to leave for France.

Mother was staying with a good friend she had on the Berggasse, around the corner from Dr. Freud's home. (Freud and his family had managed to get to England, I was told. A friend in Turkey paid the Nazis a ¼ million dollars to let them go?)

We had a medical doctor in our family. A cousin of mother's. His name was Nathanson. He attended mother when I was born. He and his wife committed suicide when the Germans entered Vienna.

The express I took, needed 12 hours, a long night, to get to Aachen. It's not very pleasant to sit on a wooden bench that long without sustenance besides a piece of bread. I arrived dead tired, coming down with a cold. Headed straight for the friendly hotel where we had stayed early in August. No room.

I didn't think that was a problem. There were a number of hotels in the area.

No room in any of them. One hotel was so large, it had two entrances. I went back to that one going through the other entrance, not realizing that I had been there before until I got to the receptionist. We recognized each other and I apologized for coming back. The man leaned close to me and said, " Don't waste your time, young man, we can't rent rooms to Jews anymore."

I walked back to the railway station, bought a ticket to the nearest little town, went out on the quay, sat on a bench and tried to sleep. It was not long before two civilians came by and ask for my ID. I showed them my passport, my train ticket, and they told me that they saw me sleeping and that was against the law. I should go into the waiting room to sleep.

They walked me in there where it was nice and warm. Did not say anything about me being Jewish, a fact plainly stamped in my passport. One left, the other one sat himself across from where I sat and pretended to read a news paper.

I got little sleep, but had much to think about with my stuffed-up head. No doubt the civilians were Gestapo. Their gray raincoat and hat was their uniform. In the morning I wanted to have a talk with the lady in the hotel we had stayed at.

As soon as I left the railway station, the man who sat up reading a paper, was following me. So, I went to a busy street nearby and started walking around the block. The man got tired of following me around the block and slowed down, increasing the distance between us.

When he was a whole block behind me, I turned the corner, ran and jumped on a passing street car.

The lady at the hotel gave me some coffee and apologized for what was going on in Germany now, but could not help me, except that she knew of some Jews I might want to talk to. She gave me the name of some people who owned a vinegar factory.

I made sure I was not followed when I went to see them.

They still ran their business, but their son was in a concentration camp. They could not do much for me, but would let me have dinner with them and sleep in their son's room. I had to swear that I would take all precautions about being followed, and not come if I were.

This arrangement would last for a week, after which I would have to find something else.

The next morning, I headed for a secondary road that led to the border and beyond to Maastricht, an ancient city in Holland, where the Belgian, Dutch and the German borders met.

Got through the German border guard after they checked all my orifices to make sure I was not smuggling diamonds.

There was a path that led straight into Holland.

Was there before noon. Took the first train in the first village I got to, and was arrested and taken off the train in Maastricht, put on another train going the opposite direction and was back in Aachen in no time at all.

Recouped the next day, and nursing my diminishing cold, I studied my map some more and tried again the following day. This was my fifth attempt at crossing the border. Had done it three times with mother. So far I had gone back to Germany without making a fuss. This time I decided to try resisting. At Maastricht I was arrested and taken to the police station as before to wait for a train going back. I told the officer there that I had family in Amsterdam, no one in Germany, that the Germans have threatened my life should I return, (which was true), and that all I wanted was to join my aunt. He wanted to know where the family lived in Amsterdam.
I gave him aunt Hilda's address. He called Amsterdam and spoke with someone in authority there. Then told me I had to go back.

I told him that I did not want to go back. He called an assistant from the other room, put handcuffs on me and a chain between my feet.

So I was walked outside between two guardians of the law. People stopped and stared at me while I was helped up onto the back of a bike.

The way back to Germany was very awkward and embarrassing. The cuffs let my hands move forward enough so that I could hold on to the belt of the police man who pedaled me back to the border. The chain on my feet made an awful racket rubbing against the spokes of the bicycle wheel. I hoped the spokes would break but they did not.

It was dark when we got to the border. The man removed the cuffs and chain. I was sore all over and could hardly move. All this time the man had not said one word. He now pointed straight ahead on the road we were on. "Go" he said, "Germany is 100 meters from here. I light your way."

I did not feel like thanking him, so I just walked back to Germany. After a little while the man turned the flashlight off and left me in total darkness. It was so dark, I could not see a thing. Slowly I walked on, so mad and sore, I began to cry.

Suddenly a flashlight was turned on a few inches in front of my eyes. A man shouted in German: "Halt, who goes there!?"

"Well," the voice said, "I hope I didn't scare you?"

I shook my head, even though he had scared me plenty. "Come on," he said, "let's get you warm."

A few feet and we were inside a guard hut. The man in the uniform of the German border guard, was probably fifty years old. He asked me how I got here. I told him about trying to get to Amsterdam or Brussels where I had family. Showed him my passport.

"I will be off duty in an hour." He said. "I know how to get to Brussels. I take you there tonight."

This took care of my weariness. I was sitting on a chair now resting and getting warm. The man gave me an apple, went outside several times to check on things. He told me that he would drive me to Brussels on a motorcycle. The only problem was that he did not own a motorcycle, but would borrow one from a friend.

In the pitch dark we walked to the friend's home. In the beam of the flashlight I could see where I was walking and get glimpses of concrete blocks and barbed wire around us. By the time we got to where we were going it was one in the morning.

We woke the friend and his wife. They let us in and I heard the man ask to borrow the motorbike. The friend started shouting that he would not let the man have the bike to drive a Jew to Brussels or anywhere else. The woman kept shaking her head and saying "No, sir, No sir."

I could tell that the man, who had brought me was disappointed. He did not say anything for a while after we left the place and the lights had gone out. Then he said that he was sorry but that all he could do now was to take me to a streetcar that would take me back to Aachen.

My hosts saw that I was totally exhausted when I got to their place early in the morning. They gave me to eat and suggested that I needed to rest for a day and think things over. Maybe go back to Vienna. Things might not be as bad as I imagined them to be. But I could not stay with them much longer. The Gestapo would find out about me sooner or later and then we all would be in trouble.

I thought about my attempts at crossing the border. Each time I had been picked up trying to take a train. I re-studied my map and became convinced that what I had to do was to walk into Belgium, instead of Holland, skirt Maastricht, the Dutch border patrols, then keep going west to a railway station in Belgium, beyond border guards, and take a train there.

This would mean a lot of walking. Not a problem. I was a boy scout, was I not? We were in the first week of December (1938) now and it was getting quite cold. I took a streetcar into town to get some gloves and I don't remember what. As the streetcar passed the railway station, I saw a familiar figure in the crowd. My mother!!! She was standing at the edge of the sidewalk, in her best blue dress, as if trying to decide which way to go!

Shocked and dismayed I got off the streetcar. Of course, we hugged and were glad to see each other.

Yes, she was supposed to wait to hear from me, but she had not heard from me, and worried, she had come looking for me.

I took her with me to the Vinegar factory owners, (who did no longer own their factory, but were retained to run it). These people had just impressed upon me their desire for me to go away and now here I was back with my mother. Mother had just spent the night on the express and did not look or feel so chipper.

I have to admit that I was embarrassed. I told these kind people that my mother needed to rest one day. That the next morning we would be on our way before sunrise, and that we would not come back to bother them. And, that we would be very grateful to them always.

We left on the 8th of December at 5:30 AM. It was just light enough so we could see, and I told myself and my mother I knew where I was going. We both wore winter coats, gloves and scarves. Mother had brought a medium sized suitcase which I carried.

By daybreak we were at a small border check point on a narrow road at the beginning of a dense forest. There was the usual treatment of orifices after the suitcase and our clothing was searched. They took our money, handed us seven marks each, and admonished us not to come back to Germany if we knew what was good for us.

Now, I wanted to sneak by the Belgian border check point. (This was our first attempt at the Belgian border, just a bit south of the Dutch border.) We got off the road and slowly walked into the woods. The sun was barely getting over the horizon. Many of the trees were bare. Orange and rust-colored leaves covered the ground ankle deep. In the silence of the forest the crunching of leaves sounded awfully loud. Mother walked behind me. I wondered whether or not we were still in Germany, when I caught some movement from the corner of my eyes.

Two men were walking next to each other. They wore black uniforms and had black German Shepherds on a leash. I stopped, motioned mother down and got to the ground next to her behind a large tree. The patrol was some two hundred feet ahead of us, walking from the left to the right. Apprehensive, but also excited, I watched them and the dogs until they disappeared. These men, even though dressed in black, were not Germans. I was sure of it. We were no longer in Germany!

Re-energized, we walked on, west, away from the sunrise, away from the Nazis. We watched for more patrols, but there were none. Instead we arrived at a metal fence, over six feet tall, that stretched as far to the right and to the left of us as we could see. It was like a chicken wire fence, but the metal mesh was strong and rigid. Every few feet there was a steel post.

On the other side of the fence, maybe fifteen feet from it, was a river, and to our right a stone bridge consisting of three vaults. As we stood there wondering what to do, a train crossed the bridge. That was no German train! Also, we noticed there was a highway on the other side of the river, going south and north. People passed occasionally on the highway. All in perfect view of the river.

Well, we did have to get across. Mother and I expressed regrets about not having learned to swim. Then we walked to the bridge and under it, where we were least likely to be seen. I threw mothers suitcase and her purse over the fence, then helped her up. As she climbed over it and down the other side, I remembered that she was forty-two years old, and I was kind of proud of the way she handled herself.

I followed her, and then, holding her suitcase over my head, she her purse, in the shadow of the massive bridge, we walked into the ice-cold river. At the deepest, the water came to my neck. Mother, who was a little smaller than I, stretched a bit with her nose in the air.

When we emerged on the other side, we must have been a sight to behold. Under the bridge, we shook all the water off we could and wrung our coats out. Also my jacket.

We were not only soaking wet, but freezing. Fortunately, the sun was shining. Shivering violently we got on the road and started to walk as fast as we could to dry out and get warm. I thought I knew where I was going. Mother wanted to make sure. The road signs were in Dutch and in French. Were we in no-mans land? (I did not know that two languages were spoken in Belgium.)

We were sort of half dry when we stopped a nice looking elderly couple and ask them if we were on the right way to Maastricht. Very sweetly they told us that we were going the wrong way and then pointed us South.

So we were heading south for about fifteen minutes while I was trying to visualize the map of the area. No matter which way I looked at it, we should be going north.

It was going on two o'clock in the afternoon. I stopped with mother. We sat on a boulder along the road ate one of the chocolate bars we had brought, while I tried to persuade mother to turn around.

After a while she said that there was no doubt those people saw we had come through the river. "They didn't ask us anything, just smiled and were nice. Okay! We turn around. I hope you are right." So did I. My underwear and my feet were still wet. No doubt mother was not drier than I. And we looked pretty shabby.

When we came to a bend in the road, I saw Maastricht before us. Shortly we came to the railway crossing I had looked for and we got off the road and followed the rails around the city into Belgium and to the next village. When we finally got there, the sun was setting.

We had eaten our second chocolate bar and drank the tea we had brought in a glass liter bottle. We combed our hair and fussed a bit with our now perfectly dry clothing before we entered the small and cozy railway station. The place was blessedly warm. Only one other traveler was sitting on a bench. Seemed to be a student. I walked to the ticket counter and asked the middle-aged man for two tickets to Brussels. As we were in an area of the country that once was Germany, (Eupen-Malmédy) the man spoke German. I handed him the German Marks to pay for the tickets. He frowned, picked up the phone and dialed a number. My first impulse was to run. But I was much too tired to do so. They would have to carry me back to Germany, I would not go. The man hung the phone up, and gave me change in Belgian francs. He apparently had called to ask if he could take German money.

The trip to Brussels was exciting and scary. Whenever a conductor came by to check our tickets, I held my breath.

We had to change trains in Liège. From a local to an express. God, was that possible? This train was very crowded. The people spoke French. What a beautiful sound! And no Nazis! I was in a trans. Mother sat next to me, mum. I wonder how she felt.

When we got off the train at the Brussel's Terminal, the Gare du Nord, the electric clock over the exit said eight minutes after eight. The station was aglow with lights, alive with laughing and gregarious people. After the drab, somber and humorless Vienna, and the even drabber and sourly Germany this was like a dream.

I did not feel tired then. The large square in front of the Gare du Nord, was a feast of lights and colors. The "Bon Marché", a large department store, had its front facade covered by a curtain of lights that slowly opened to reveal a Christmas motif. I had never seen so many cars, buses and streetcars and colorful lights.

When we finally moved on, I realized I had taken the wrong turn when leaving the railway station. There were police men about, easily seen in their white helmets. They still could nab us and turn us back. We came to a taxi stand. I walked up to one, showed him my stepfather's address and the money I had left. He nodded and ten minutes later we were reunited with Margit and her dad at their small apartment.

By ten o'clock, my stepfather and I walked into a café where uncle Julius sat at a table playing chess. It had been arranged, that I would stay with him.

Uncle Julius had a large furnished room, next to the "Gare du Midi". I stayed with him for several month while I learned to get around in Brussels.

Eventually, my parents rented an apartment at 10 rue de la Bienfaisance, near the Gare du Nord. Uncle Julius left for the USA .

To my children:

At one time during World War II, I had the opportunity to send a telegram through the International Red Cross in Brussels to our relatives in the United States. Although I did not believe the telegram would reach its destination, I heard after the war that the telegram had been send. That message was the saddest our relatives ever received. In it I had named those of our family who were no longer among us and those who still were. Also, I suggested that when the war would be over, not one of us would be left. As it turned out, seven out of fifty did survive.

In a letter to my aunts in New York, after the liberation of Brussels, I completed the list of those who had been lost. All of my father's family (Salomon Selzer) with the exception of his two sisters who were in the U.S.A., had perished. The only details I learned were about my father's adopted son, Edward Selzer, who at the beginning of the war had been a student at the University of Oxford, England.

It seems that he joined the R.A.F. became a fighter-pilot and was shot down during the Battle of Britain, only days after he was married.

My stepfather's family (Emil Kaplan) perished also with the exception of one of his sisters (Finny) who lived with her family in the U.S.A., one of his brothers, (Simon) who was in Brussels, and four cousins. One of those, Armin Drexler, lived in Toronto.

My mother's family, (Mother: Kaplan, née Kosak) with the exception of those who were in the U.S.A., was reduced to my sister Margit and I.

The letter to my aunts, which contained the above message brought an immediate inquiry about what had happened, how and why?

I felt guilty at the time for having escaped with my life. Contemplating in detail what had happened was very painful for me. Much I did not know. Also, I did not have answers to the "how" and "why". I must admit, I am glad that I don't know how our people perished. I don't believe I could have coped with details of that knowledge.

All I could do was to let my family in the U.S.A. know what had happened to me and to those with whom I had contact.

My report to my aunts became something of a book. I had made notes during the war, which I hid under a floor board in my room. Yet these notes were far from complete. When I tried to put things together, I was physically ill and mentally I was undergoing a traumatic adjustment to my post-war existence.

I omitted details that seemed unimportant. Also, I did not write with a story in mind. Rather I attempted to relate events, as much as possible in the sequence in which they took place.

There are some errors no doubt. Some events had faded in my memory, and some mix-up in sequence could have occurred.

The original report was written in German. (I did not know English at the time). Twelve years later, I began to translate my story into English for you. What photographs and documents I have remain with the original.

The reason I went through the renewed pain of rewriting this account for you is that sooner or later people want to know something about their family and where they came from.

Perhaps, this account will not satisfy your curiosity because it tells mostly of my own experience over a limited period of time. I apologize for this narrow scope.

The reason there is no account here about my childhood is that my aunts, for whom this report was originally written, knew about my childhood in Vienna. They had been there.

Kindly remember that when the events described occurred, I had the views of a teen-ager of that time.

I can tell you without reservation that all of your relatives were good and decent people, entirely undeserving of their brutal and untimely end. I loved them very much.

In a way I am glad that you did not know them, for if you did you would spend your life in much sorrow as I have done.

9 Mai 1940

One saw more and more soldiers. Day and night these khaki-dressed men seemed to be coming and going to the railway station, la Gare du Nord, less than one block from where we lived. (6 rue de la Bienfaisance) The way some of these soldiers dressed was shocking. They were sloppy. Occasionally, one would drag himself along in slippers.

On weekends, cousin Herbert and I liked to go hiking around Brussels. (Walking was mostly what we could afford.) Sometimes we encountered small army units on maneuvers. These were a better sight to behold. Their comportment was brisk and efficient. Their equipment seemed up to date. The occasional fighter plane roaring overhead was sometimes an up to date Hurricane. Rumors had these planes stationed at Liège, which is not far from the German border. Hardly any place in Belgium is.

There were many rumors. Most were wishful thinking fueled by the dislike many Belgians had for the Germans, a dislike rooted in memories of World War I. And since the German attack on Poland, more and more Belgians expressed their sentiments in public. Where people gathered there was talk about marching on Berlin.

I did not believe that little Belgium could march on big Germany, but having come from Austria where the Germans were considered by most to be God's gift to the world, I enjoyed and admired the brave talk of the Belgians.

Like the majority of the population, Herbert and I believed that war with Germany was inevitable. I suppose our opinion was the reflection of those we found ourselves surrounded by. For us it meant to do away with the hated Nazis. It was as simple as that. How ignorant we were!

Leo Heber, who occupied a room on the floor below our small apartment in the rue de la Bienfaisance, did not believe in war. Leo, my stepfather's cousin was a thoroughly peaceful man in thought and in appearance. He was rather obese with a shiny round bald head. Despite of these physical handicaps he was very pleasant and optimistic and a first-rate musician. To know Leo was to like him.

At the time he took his meals with us and always raved about my mother's cooking. Of course, mother was fond of Leo.

According to a family rumor Leo was "off the rocker". I concluded this was because Leo, who was in his thirties, failed to display any interest in the opposite sex. He had other peculiarities as well. For instance, he refused to eat when there was a cat around, or to play his accordion unless there was total silence. Mother ascribed his unusual behavior to an overdose of intellect. She would say that the poor man had studied too much.

A few weeks before the beginning of this report, sometimes in April, my stepfather's father died of lung cancer at the age of 78. We youngsters called him the "Old Kaplan". His first name was David. He was always kind to me and his death, though not unexpected, saddened me.

For sixty years the Old Kaplan had worked as a type-setter for the "Kronen Zeitung", a widely read newspaper in Vienna. He began to work there as a boy when he arrived in Vienna from some Stetl in Russia. As soon as the Nazis came to Austria he was fired, as were all other Jews. Actually, he was lucky that he escaped with his life and his wife Helena, to Brussels.

At the time we wondered if with better medical attention he could have been saved. There had been no money for that. Nor was there any for his funeral.

My stepfather went to a committee for financial aid to refugees, where he begged for help. This was to no avail. So he threatened, pounded desks with fists. No results. Then uncle Simon followed with a somewhat different strategy. Still no funeral. Then cousin Leo went and came back with all the arrangements made. Of course, everyone wondered how he convinced the committee to bury Grandpa. Leo only said one had to know how to talk with those people.

The Old Kaplan (who was a Kohanim and a Cantor) was buried in a pine box which was stuck in a cubicle of the catacombs at the cemetery of Woluwe St. Lambert, where poor Jews were buried. (Grave number 253.)

Grandmother Helena moved in with us. She spent her time annoying everyone in sight.

For no apparent reason, I had developed a painful gland infection in the pit of my left arm. It was supposed to be cut open on the 10. May. On the eve of that day, I went to bed early to seek rest and refuge from my discomfort.

My bed stood next to a wide open window. It was a still and star-studded night. When I turned over in my sleep, pain would awaken me.

Once more I woke up moaning. It was very warm. I threw the blanket off me to be more comfortable, and was half asleep again when I heard the planes. Perhaps, I thought, the English were flying over Belgium to bomb Germany.

A thunder-like detonation sent me whirling from bed. Only for a moment did I believe that there had been some kind of explosion, then I realized that the thunder had come from the ack-ack (anti aircraft artillery) at the railway station.

Already I stood dressed at the window to stare at the yet dark sky. Only in the east did the new day wear a broad pink band of growing light.

Everyone had jumped out of bed when I did. Bewildered shouts were muffled by the guns which fired a few more volleys. The building shook at its very foundation and the windows rattled.

The bedroom windows opened to the West. I ran into the kitchen were the windows opened to the East. Germans would come from there.

Suddenly the shooting stopped. No planes, no bombs, only the shouting of confused people all about us. Leo appeared in his window clad in a nightgown.

"What do you say?" I shouted down to him. He shook his head:

"Impossible! A plane must have gotten lost!"

Grandma Helena protested: "Such a scandal! What is going on? What kind of a place is this you have? One can't even sleep here."

Over the shouting and the excited talk there was the slowly increasing roar of approaching aircraft. And there they came. I counted thirty in a tight formation. They were coming directly at us from the now pale orange sky in the east.

Shivering and trembling inside with a rage I had not known before, I forgot the people around me and jumping about by the windows I shouted on the top of my lungs: "Shoot them down! Shoot those Nazis down!"

No response. No ack-ack. Windows and roofs along the street were crowded with people. Many were in their pajamas. Some stared at the sky with binoculars. Uncombed and in wonder, as if mesmerized, they waited in silence. Apparently, no one thought to seek shelter.

Somehow I had regained my composure. I heard my mother say, "I would not be surprised if they bomb the railway station."

And I noticed that a very pale and quiet Leo had joined us.

All at once the ack-ack tore the atmosphere with a vehemence that thunder rarely has. Throughout and all around the city, the guns had begun to fire at the very same moment. The sounds, sights and the shaking of the building were awesome. In seconds the city was under an umbrella of glowing tracer projectiles, dancing crazily into the now cobalt sky, reaching for the planes. People recoiled from the windows, from the deafening roar. Exploding shells stuck bouquets of small white puffs into the sky.

Momentarily, the Nazis seemed to be shaken. They broke their formation in apparent disarray. But my elation soon turned to disappointment, for despite of the vigorous anti-aircraft fire none of the planes came down.

Then came the shrill whistle of falling bombs, followed by crashing explosions. People disappeared from the windows and roofs.

A plane seemed to be hit. It wavered as if it was going to fall but recovered, despite my curses, and flew on.

Eventually, the planes disappeared in the West. The shooting over the city ceased. Only occasional explosions could be heard in the distance. The sun had risen into a gorgeous, limpid blue sky. A light breeze dispersed the ack-ack puffs.

Where had the bombs fallen? What would happen now? Just how long would it take for "us" to defeat Germany? We shouted and talked excitedly, not really caring if anyone was listening.

Suddenly the air raid sirens sounded the official alert. It was nine a.m. The spectacle had lasted four hours. It seemed as if only minutes had gone by since I jumped from my bed. I became aware of the swelling under my arm. Leo, in his quiet way, was still trying to explain how all may be nothing but a dreadful error.

I finished dressing and went in the street. It was getting warm and I perspired. The atmosphere of anguish and excitement which prevailed in the streets contaminated me quickly. People with drawn faces stood in small groups whispering. There was a crowd in front of a freshly printed poster pasted on a wall.

"Special Announcement: Mobilization. German armies crossed the Belgian and the Dutch border at 5 a.m. They have been engaged by our troops. The King has declared war against Germany. French and English Armed Forces are on their way to assist us..."

An ambulance sped by. Black columns of smoke arose at the edge of the city. Naively I thought the time had come the Germans will be taught their lesson. It did not occur to me that they could get to Brussels - ever, nor did I give any thought to other kinds of unpleasantness a war could bring.

Almost arrived at the school where I studied fine-mechanics (the AREPROR, a technical training center established by the Jewish community for immigrant youngsters.) I met David, a fellow student I had befriended. "You might as well turn around", he told me sourly, "The place is closed. The Belgians are already there and are taking the equipment."

"This is ridiculous", I protested, "they know we are Jews." (I should mention that the instructors were all Jewish immigrants. Most were engineers. One had over seventy patents to his name.)

We were conversing in German. David whispered fearfully: "Not so loud, man! Do you want us to get lynched?"

"What are you going to do?" I asked him. "Me?" He said, "My parents are preparing to leave by car for France. And you?"

"Me? I don't know. Do you believe that the Germans will get to Brussels?"

He sneered, "Do you think the Russians will stop them? Well, much luck to you. Good bye and take care! Drink tea and wait."

We shook hands and separated as I decided that I had really never cared much for the guy. Drink tea and wait! He was from Berlin, had a weird accent and used all kinds of weird expressions. Well why should he not laugh? His family had money. Angry, I started for home. Since I did not have the streetcar fare, I had to walk.

At home I found more excitement. The government had ordered all male aliens to report to the nearest police precinct before the day was out with food for eight hours.

My mother was in tears. Leo was packing a suitcase. My stepfather was not home. I suggested to Leo that we leave at once, and to my surprise he agreed. He actually seemed to be in a hurry. I put a piece of soap and my toothbrush in a paper bag. And, afraid that my mother would make a scene, I told her that I was only going to see what was going on. No, I did not want to wait for my stepfather. Although it was hot, I took my overcoat with me. Mother seemed glad that I was going with Leo and so was I. I enjoyed his company. Also, he spoke French while I only spoke German and Flemish and Yiddish.

As we walked the long, shadeless, uphill boulevard along the "Jardin Botanique", perspiring freely, we noted that in our haste we had forgotten to bring something to drink or to eat.

Arrived at the "Maison Communale (District city hall) de St. Josse," we stood in line to hand our identification card to an unfriendly Belgian official. Then a policeman escorted us to a room. He unlocked its door, pushed us inside and locked the door behind us.

More men came and soon the room was very crowded. The only window was closed and locked. Body odors and cigarette smoke saturated the atmosphere.

Time passed slowly and painfully.

Occasionally air raid sirens wailed. Finally, about 4 p.m. we were taken through a large corridor to a loading dock at the back of the building.

To move out of the stinky room was a pleasure even though unsmiling police guarded us closely as we crowded the dock.

We stood in the shadow of the late afternoon inhaling its warm, fresh air, wondering what would happen next. Some men tried to start conversations with one or the other of the policemen surrounding us, but these kept mum.

No one bothered to explain anything to us. Occasionally more prisoners came to the dock to join us. I looked for my stepfather but did not see him.

However, we did not have to wait very long. A large army truck arrived. An official called names off a list. Those called climbed on the truck. When it was overloaded, its gate was raised, locked, and it took off.

The truck returned every half hour for another load. Much guessing was going on about our destination. It could not be very far. I was vexed by the treatment we had received. We had not been offered any information, nor even a drink of water.

The infection in my armpit continued to bother me. I worried I might get separated from Leo. However we did wind up on the same truck. I managed to get on last. This put me at the gate where I could look outside and also get fresh air.

In front of the building tearful women waved at us. Some called names, perhaps in the hope of getting a last glimpse of a husband, father or son. I was glad that my mother was not there.

The truck had poor suspension and jolted us badly. But soon we realized that we were lucky to have a ride. We overtook several columns of prisoners who were walking, surrounded by white helmeted Belgian police. More policemen than prisoners. From the sidewalks people threw debris and curses. Some prisoners dragging suitcases walked with drooping heads.

These poor devils, I thought, hate the Nazis probably more so than the Belgians do. It had been so nice here where nobody cared about Jews. Now we were the enemy again. This time hated for being German!

From a radio in a Café we passed, we could hear a military band blaring the Belgian national anthem.

An infantry detachment marched gravely along a broad thoroughfare. In their heavy uniforms and under the load of their weapons they seemed to simmer in the heat.

Finally, we came to a very large army installation enclosed by a high red brick wall: The barracks of Etterbeek. In a courtyard the truck came to a halt and we were ordered off. An army officer took us to a weather-beaten brick building. Two soldiers opened a wide door then locked it behind us.

We were in a gymnasium. Muscle-conditioning equipment stood about. A thin coat of straw covered the concrete floor. The few small dirty windows, high on the wall behind iron bars, made the gym ideal for its present function. On each side of the door, through which we had been ushered in, was an iron barred window of a more normal size. Still, much could not be seen through them. A little sky, lots of brick walls and two armed guards.

Like the room at the precinct, the gym was overcrowded. I sat on a spot I found against a wall, glad to be able to lean against something. Many did not have that comfort. Most stood around sad and perplexed. Some seemed indifferent. Few were making conversation. Leo had found a place for himself at the other side of the gym.

The remainder of the afternoon passed slowly. No other prisoners were brought to the gym. At dusk an officer and some soldiers came. They handed our identification papers back to us, and searched us. Pocket-knives, razors, cigarettes and matches were confiscated. We all were thirsty and some of us were asking for water. There was a faucet on the wall outside right next to the door, but water was denied us.

After the soldiers left, some men began to eat. A few had their suitcases stuffed with food. Bottles appeared, and in the growing darkness men ate and drank. Most, like myself, had not brought anything. Some bits of food were handed to those few who meekly but persistently begged for it. I was not hungry but very thirsty. However, I did not suffer and I was not about to beg.

Then it turned out that smokers had hidden supplies, and smoking started after the feeding was over. The air fouled rapidly with stale tobacco smoke. It seemed to me that with all the dry straw on the floor, we were in danger of going up in flames.

When night came, I made a pillow of my overcoat and tried to sleep, wondering what my family was doing. Alternately, I felt warm and chilly. The pain under my arm was dull and steady. In the distance I heard sirens wail and ack-ack bark. Finally, the whispering and mumbling around me lulled me into an uneasy sleep.

A frightful cry startled me. I sat up and stared fearfully into the dark. Again and again someone cried out in agony. Everyone was awake.

Apparently, someone had some sort of seizure. Men began excitedly to call for a light and for a doctor. Some hammered at the door and called for the guards. The latter ignored the commotion. At last, matches and lighters came in handy. There were several doctors among us and they were already busy with the sick man who was against the wall, right across from where I was, screaming and moaning. When he came to, he cried for water and for his wife. Apparently, there was no water left. No one had bothered to bring much to drink.

The voice grew weaker, turned into a pitiful rattle which also grew weaker until it finally ceased. My heart pounded wildly as I thought I just heard a man die. I could not go back to sleep. Later, when I had calmed down, I still was prevented from sleeping by a man who snored terribly. He sounded like a saw cutting wood. Occasionally someone would wake him, but after a few minutes of relief, the snoring resumed.

There was no toilet. Men urinated in the middle of the place on a bundle of straw. I felt sorry for those who sat close to the chosen spot.

By morning the stench was incredible. The sun was shining brightly and soon it became unpleasantly warm. Soldiers unlocked the door, but would not open it more than one inch. Nearly everyone pushed against that opening to get a breath of fresh air.

Eventually, we were allowed, one by one, to go to a toilet. I decided against the excursion because one had to go in the company of two soldiers who oversaw one's activity. Besides, because this privilege was quickly abused by those who wanted some exercise and a peaceful smoke, it did not last long.

Again we were refused water with the exception of a tin cup the guards handed to those who constantly begged for water. Whether the guards pitied us or enjoyed the spectacle of men fighting like animals was hard to tell, because the water was quickly spilled and no one got any. I sat on my spot on the straw watching the repugnant scene at the door. I also noticed with relief, that the sick man was not dead after all. He was very pale and leaned quietly against the wall.

I had lost my sense of time and was not sure whether it was morning or afternoon. (I did not own a watch.) Leo joined me. Somehow he had obtained a few pieces of sugar and shared these with me. We talked a little. I could not say much. My mouth was so dry that my tongue insisted on sticking to the roof of my mouth. Black dots danced in front of my eyes.

Leo told me news he had heard, as it was related by the guards at the door, who now did not seem to mind talking with some of the prisoners.

It seemed that the Allied Forces were victorious. They had pushed the Germans back and taken Cologne. I believe we all felt better about everything then.

During the afternoon, some officers came and separated us according to nationality. Germans on one side, Austrians on the other. We discovered that there were a few Hungarians and even two Americans among us, as well as others. The Americans and a few others nationals were immediately released.

I had lost my place against the wall, and to my dismay found myself next to the heavy snore. Well, there was reason to believe that we would not be in the gym much longer. After men and dust settled in the new places, the men getting acquainted with their new neighbors soon speculated about what lay in store for us. Mostly it was thought that we would be send to France. From there, some would have themselves already escape to Switzerland.

If only this infection would not bother me, so I could think better.
One week ago, I had my sixteenth birthday. Went to the movies with cousin Herbert. (The oldest son of Rose, my mother's sister, and Simon, my stepfather's brother. They had four children: Trude, Herta, Herbert, Ernst, and Rose was expecting a fifth!)

(My step-father had eleven siblings. I don't remember all the names, only met a few of them. Sidonia, the youngest, had been adopted when her mother, my stepfather's oldest sister, died in child-birth. Sidonia and her sister, Hilda, were in Amsterdam. One of the Kaplans, Arthur, the youngest male, died a young man. My mother, Cecilia, had eight siblings Maurice, Victor, Julius, Jacob, Siddy, Mina, Rose and Anne. Not necessarily in order of age. Maurice, Victor, Julius, Siddy, Mina and Anne were in New York City in the U.S.A.)
(Large families were fashionable at the turn of the century.)

I was thinking of the family, wondering where everyone was; especially how my mother was doing. Mother was so emotional about everything.

The arrival of an officer interrupted my doleful reflections. He offered to look at those prisoners who were ill. I was at the end of the short line that formed. It moved quickly. Soon I faced the less than pleased officer who stated tersely that I was a picture of excellent health, or something to that effect. The exact wording escaped me because of my imperfect French. I unbuttoned my shirt and painfully lifted my arm to show the man the swollen infection filling my armpit. He looked at it, touched it carefully with one finger, then said something about nonsense, and waved me on. Leo had just stepped up. He looked at my misery and suggested the possibility of blood poisoning. I told him that the officer had thought otherwise. Leo asked where the idiot was, but the idiot had gone.

Later in the evening, some soldiers arrived at the gym dragging a large steaming kettle, causing much excitement. Everyone seemed to come to life and hurriedly a line formed. There must have been close to two hundred prisoners, but there was only one glass. The brew was boiling hot and the line moved slowly. Finally, my turn came, and while the filthy glass burned in my hands, I closed my eyes and tried to swallow the brown and very bitter liquid. Could not get more than half of it down.
"This is supposed to be coffee" Leo said sadly. "It's a good thing we don't know how many are ill and who they are."

Right after the coffee came a real treat. We received a sandwich. A piece of hamburger between two slices of white bread. This time the distribution went much faster. Ridden with self-pity I ate mine. It must have been the smallest of the lot.

That night, before the door was locked, soldiers brought an empty pot and dragged it to the center of the gym. We had a toilet.

The night was very restless for me. Outside, sirens were followed by gun fire, and inside, the man next to me snored like a giant from a *Grimm* fairy tale.

When morning finally came, I was happy to see the door opened. Some fresh air pushed itself through the dust of straw that hung over us like a curse and made us itch and cough.

Suddenly we received orders to pack. Excitement flared up again amidst speculation as to our destination. Most of us were eager to go to some fantasy destination in France. Some seemed worried about leaving their families.

There was not much to be packed of course, and soon we stood around waiting. It was noon before we were taken outside. The fresh air was dazzling and delicious to breath.

Having formed a column, we marched to an immense parade ground where several thousand prisoners were already assembled in long dark columns. Luckily, we came to halt in the shadow of a brick wall that ran along one side of the grounds. On the other side of the wall were stables where more prisoners must have spent the past two days.

Suddenly, someone grabbed my shoulders, and turning I found my stepfather before me.

"There you are!" he said, "I have been looking for you. Hurry and come with me. I already have dismissal papers, and you will be able to get out too."

"But I am going to France," I protested weakly, while disappointment crept through me.

"Don't talk such nonsense," he retorted, "You know that you have to get to a doctor."

I nodded: "But we have some doctors here."

"And what am I going to tell your mother? You should have seen how she carried on when you did not come home the other night."

"Mother?" I mumbled defeated. "Okay I am coming."

"How about you?" I asked Leo who had been standing with us.

He turned away and looked at some bricks at the wall.

"I am going to France," he said quietly.

We shook hands and parted.

My stepfather took me to a table which had been set up in a courtyard manned by a civilian and a gendarme. My stepfather explained that I was only sixteen and besides needed medical care. And the civilian, who probably did not understand one word of German, nodded agreeably and handed me a pink slip of paper. No sooner did I have the paper in my hands when sirens wailed.

The pair at the table got up and left in a hurry. A few men who had formed a line behind us had missed their chance to get out. One German bomber appeared. It flew very low along the horizon and was shot at furiously.

We walked to the same big gate through which we had been brought in, showed our papers to the sentinel and were free. It was 3 p.m. on May 12.

To our surprise we found mother and my sister Margit outside. They had come earlier with some bread for us. It had not been accepted and they had stood there waiting in the hope to see us. Now they embraced us and cried.

As we walked home, I marveled at the wonderful feeling of being free!

My stepfather and I were rather dirty and anxious to wash. With joy I noticed English soldiers driving about in military cars and on motorcycles. It hardly mattered that they seemed poorly armed. What did I know about arms anyway? What mattered was that they were here. They had come. The Germans were going to be sorry to have bothered us.

At home we washed, ate heartily, and then in Margit's company I left for the Hospital of *St. Josse*.

We arrived at 6 p.m. The place seemed deserted. Along the white empty corridors we walked from office to office looking for a doctor. Finally, we found an incredibly fat nurse.

She examined me and told me, while searching noisily for some appropriate instruments, that she would take care of me without delay. She asked my name, and since she spoke Flemish, I could converse well with her. Her voice boomed at me as if I were two blocks away: " Ah, you are an Austrian Jew!"

I admitted to this inconvenience and asked her how long my infection would need to be cared for because I might well want to put some distance between myself and the German armies.

After all, I remembered that most prisoners had been anxious to get to France. Especially Leo's insistence on going there had shaken my confidence in the military situation.

"Ho, ha," the nurse roared, "there is no reason to fear the Germans. They are as human as we are. One of my brothers was killed in the First World War. Now I have another brother in the army. And why? And for what?"

I said, " I guess you don't know the Germans."

She only laughed to that and I began to feel ill at ease.

My uneasiness, however, could have been caused by her approach with a tray of dangerous looking tools. She picked a thin tube of glass and sprayed liquid air over the infection. A thin coat of ice formed. Through it, the enormous nurse launched a bistoury.

"Schwoops!" she shouted and laughed. She withdrew the blade quickly while pressing a large vessel under my arm to catch the evil looking stuff that emerged. She squeezed the open wound with gusto until only clean blood came. I would have never thought that I carried that much junk in me.

As it turned out, my impromptu surgeon had missed the tendon in the armpit by a hair.

"You sure are one lucky boy," she hollered, "and getting a little pale too. Ho, ho. Just sit still. I will get some stuff to wrap you with."

She ambled from the room. I got up to look in the mirror hanging on a wall. The woman was right. I was as white as a ghost. The floor seemed to move under my feet, but just when I decided I was going to fall on my face, the nurse was back and grabbed me. She sat me down firmly, poured Eau de Cologne from a glass gallon jug on a large sponge, and after washing me with it, wrapped me liberally with bandages. I was told to come back in the morning, thanked her and we left.

People turned and stared at us. Margit assured me that this was because I looked like an authentic war casualty.

Days of indecision followed. Refugees, many dragging carts containing their possessions, flooded the city. Most, obviously farmers who seemed to be quite distressed. There was a shortage of shelter and many spent the nights in the street.

We began to suspect that the situation was not what was officially claimed. Night bombings became more frequent. And because the Germans dropped their bombs any old place, we began to go to the basement from our fourth floor flat when things became too lively.

Whenever this happened, and we were almost there, Grandma would remember that she had forgotten to bring her little bundle which contained yarn, sewing needles, salt, pepper, etc., or her umbrella, and back upstairs she would go in quest of these indispensables, regardless of the violence of the bombing. Or, when we would be almost in the sheltering confines of the basement, the landlady would emerge from her kitchen on the first floor and chide us for "always" running downstairs as if the Germans were out to kill civilians. Did we not know that they were civilized and that there was no need to be afraid of them? Soon we were convinced that our fat landlady and her skinny husband were nazis.

In the meantime, I went to the hospital each day to have my bandage changed. The bandages were uncomfortable and irritated my healthy armpit. Before long a new infection started there.

One morning I witnessed an air battle. Two Belgian fighter planes of WW. I. vintage had circled peacefully over the city. Suddenly, there was a burst of machine-gun fire. Six German Messerschmidts were pouncing from high on the old planes. One suddenly stood on its nose and fell like a rock. The other swung to and fro in some sort of absurd evasive action. The Germans roared in a circle around it, and soon it too fell from the sky. Seconds later I heard the crash. The Germans, one by one, dove smartly down to salute the fallen planes then vanished behind a cloud.

There was no doubt that the British who came through the city now came from the front. Covered with dirt and mud they sat dispirited on their vehicles, and the large guns pulled by some of their trucks looked not better than the soldiers.

What was going on? What was going wrong? According to the news, all was going well, but we began to distrust the news. During the night of the 16. of May, the city was bombed badly for hours. For a while we stayed upstairs, trying to decide whether or not the war had taken a turn for the worse, and if under the circumstances it would not be best to leave for France. Then, as the bombing did not seem to want to let up, we went downstairs to the basement. To our surprise and satisfaction we found the landlady there as well as her husband, their two daughters and son. Clad in their nightgowns they were standing quietly against an old stone walls. Even though the light was not very good down there, I could tell that they were actually trembling.

We stayed downstairs for most of the night. After a while, and perhaps encouraged by our sarcasm, the landlord's family became more relaxed.

Eventually we all sat around a large round table listening intently to the racket outside. The boy who was probably ten years old, showed me some drawings he had made: German soldiers and Nazi flags. When his mother noticed, she hurriedly took the drawings away, saying something about silly children. But, I felt that my suspicions about these people had been confirmed.

The next morning we actually did leave for France. We were going to walk and we did not get very far. Two blocks and grandma Helena stopped. "Tell me, what's the idea of going to France in this kind of weather? Just how far is it anyway? Pretty far? Then I won't go!"

She turned around and we had no choice but to do the same.

We had barely reached our apartment when a formidable explosion occurred, followed within seconds by another. The window I headed for flew open and struck me in the face. Two yellow columns of smoke stood on the horizon. After some excited speculation we came to the conclusion that the bridges south of the city were being blown up. The canal could not be crossed otherwise and our hope of escaping to France seemed to have gone up in yellow smoke.

During the night there were more explosions. The blacked-out city was lit be fires. (Later we found out that the army had put fire to warehouses and depots.)

People rushed through the streets with suitcases, sacks and carts. Were they trying to escape or were they looking for loot?

The morning that came after that restless night found us all quite depressed. Although I still did not want to believe that the Germans could get to Brussels, I knew, there was no reason for my optimism.

On my way to the hospital on that 17th. of May, I saw a squadron of Messerschmidts fly low over the city. No sirens and no ack-ack!

Where were all the planes we were supposed to have? Where was the army? I saw not one soldier that day, not one policeman. Streetcars were not running and one saw hardly any cars. Even though people had been leaving the city, refugees having come from the country seemed to have steadily increased in numbers. They crowded the streets and the sidewalks.

That afternoon we decided to go to the Red Cross Depot in the rue de Canal. We had found out that all the bridges had not been blown up and we hoped to join some sort of transport to France. Grandma, who did not want to go anyplace was taken to uncle Simon. Then, each one of us carrying a suitcase, we left under the gleeful stare of our landlady.

When we approached the canal, there was not a soul in the street. A Messerschmidt flew over the city. Were people now scared of them? As we passed a Café, an excited woman came running out. Gesticulating hysterically, she shouted at us and ran back inside. What she had tried to convey to us was a mystery. Even Margit who had picked up some French in school, had no idea what the woman wanted. We decided that she was nuts and went on.

Suddenly, I was lifted off the ground and hurled against a wall. Mother's scream was cut short by the thunder of a frightful explosion. Glass and debris fell around us. Already it was over. We were shaken, but all right. And now we knew what the woman had tried to tell us. The "*Citroen*" bridge, the one we had been heading for, had been blown up. Now, as long as we had come this far, we decided to go on.

The entrance to the bridge was barricaded with barbed wire and overturned vehicles and tons of debris. The bridge had collapsed in such a way that getting across it on foot was still possible. So, after some climbing we worked our way to the other side and got to our objective, the Red Cross Building on the rue de Canal.

The building was a large modern school that had been converted into a shelter for refugees. Furniture had been removed, and people crowded the classrooms. Again, most were farmers with their families.

They sat and lied around on blankets. Their sun-tanned faces, especially those of the men, reflected unhappiness and despair. Small children, perceiving that something was wrong, played very quietly. In one of the rooms we found enough space to join the misery.

Occasionally, explosions ripped the air. Again and again, I tried to tell myself that things could not be as bad as they seemed.

Late in the evening, a very pale, sad-faced official went from room to room to make a short speech which ended with a "Long live the King!" That was all I understood. But Margit, quite beside herself, told us that the man had asked us to remain calm when the Germans arrived. Frightened, I insisted that she must have misunderstood. But, the sobbing and whispering around us testified to the accuracy of Margit's translation.

Rifle fire woke us during the night. Sometimes, the shots were single, sometimes they sounded like bundles of exploding firecrackers. Occasionally, a machine-gun joined the shooting. We listened to the fighting with a heavy heart. Sporadic flashes of orange light delineated the huddled figures in our crowded room. What a sad night! The "impossible" had come true.

May 18, 1940

My stepfather and I left the Red Cross building early to go to the hospital for my treatment.

The shooting had stopped. We suspected that the Allies were gone. Our hope to get to France had dissipated. We made our way across the Citroen Bridge, and had not walked very far through the deserted streets when we saw a dust covered German soldier on a motorcycle. All alone, his rifle slung across his shoulder, he seemed quite at ease as he drove grimly by us.

Helplessly I looked about. There was no one in sight. It would have been so easy to stop him. Silently we stood and stared after him. Finally, my stepfather said, "I am going back to tell mother." I nodded and went on alone.

At the railway station (Gare du Nord) were groups of refugees who obviously had spent the night there in the street.

Some women, apparently looting, dragged sacks and carts with canned food. Not a German in sight. Had I been dreaming? But then, a couple of blocks past the railway station I saw another one. This one was walking alone, suspiciously looking about him. Covered with dirt, he looked more like a bandit than a soldier. Two women, in a hurry to get their loot home, came along dragging their burden. Eyeing the German obliquely one said, " One would think he is of the Foreign Legion."

" Oh, no," replied the other, "I think he is an American."

When I got to the rue Royal, I saw German troops in trucks, on motorcycles, in cars, on horses and also marching in columns. On and on by they went. Someone whispered, "Take your hands out of your pocket. They might shoot you."

A very low flying French reconnaissance plane flew slowly over us.

German ack-ack along the boulevard fired promptly. Dry short barks. I felt like crying.

Later that day we returned to our apartment.

Now we wondered about uncle Simon, aunt Rose and our cousins. They had been in a camp for refugees in Marneff, not far from Brussels. Rose, mother's younger sister, was expecting their fifth child, and its immanent arrival had brought them back to Brussels a few days ago. As you know, we had taken grandma Helena to them just before we left "for France."

In that camp in Marneff were also mother's youngest brother Kobi, (Jacob), my stepfather's younger brother Sigi, and his cousin Armin Drexler. What had happened to them? (Kobi returned to Brussels, was interned, send to a French concentration camp and apparently was shot and killed the day the American Army liberated that camp four years later. Sigi escaped to France to the same camp and disappeared, and Armin Drexler was on his way to Toronto, Canada.)

Within hours the Germans had built a bridge in *Laeken* and the bulk of their army rolled over it for days and nights without interruption. The ack-ack guarding their route had nothing to do. No Allied Air force. Not even one plane came to bother the Germans.

Their infantry in sweat-soaked uniforms trampled the patient pavement. Their cursing non-coms yelled as only German non-coms could: "Atten...tion. eins...zwei...drei...vier!" At vier (four) the soldiers began to sing:

"Today we want to sing a song,
About fighting and about our war.
Today our glasses shall touch;
Our brethren, on to the great victory!
Give me your hand, your wide hand.
We drive now against England...England.
And we drive, and we drive,
We drive against England, England...YES!

Eins...zwei...drei...vier!

We shall march on when all falls to pieces.
Today Germany is ours, tomorrow all of the world...

The tunes were crisp and enticing. People watched the soldiers march and listened to their songs. Though most did not understand the lyrics, they looked as if they knew their meaning. The *Teutons* had come to conquer and to kill once more.

As the occupation of the city took place swiftly, it was obvious that the Germans had been very well prepared; down to the last street sign. Government buildings became various Nazi G.H.Q.s.

German soldiers were very polite. Their pocket filled with (occupation) money, they bought all there was to be bought.

Our landlady too had been well prepared for the Germans. Her Café was quickly converted into a bordello. Very uneasy with her open friendliness toward the invader, we were looking for another place to live.

My second gland infection was nearing its "ripe" stage.

News consisted mostly of rumors. There were no newspapers as yet, and we knew no one with a radio. Soon I went daily for the German Army Newspaper "West Front", which I obtained with the help of my invalid German passport. However, we read the paper only to disclaim its contents as monstrous lies.

On June 6., aunt Rose gave birth to her fifth child, a daughter who was named Margarita, Rita for short. She had light blonde hair and light blue eyes and looked like a doll.

Uncle Simon, Rose and children had moved to a tiny house in the "Impasse Gossens", a small dead-end street which could claim to be several centuries old.

Herbert and I resumed our long walks.

Food became slowly scarce. At times Herbert and I got up at four in the morning to stand in line at the "Sarma" (department store) for a hundred grams of oil (four ounzes) or for two eggs. Getting into a line at the time we did, our turn would come about noon. Occasionally, the merchandise would be gone before our turn came and we would go home empty handed.

Cigarettes became rare also. Herbert and I stopped at all the tobacco shops on our walks to get as many packs as possible. One could only buy one pack at a time, and some merchants would only sell to their regular customers. Soon our walks became cigarette shopping tours. We made about ten francs a day reselling the cigarettes. This was not much, but better than nothing considering that we lived on welfare.

Coming home one day in June, I was intercepted by our landlady.

"Well," she said sarcastically, "are you still afraid of the Germans?"

"Of course not!" I defended myself.

"Then you wont mind coming inside the Café. Two soldiers want to treat you to a glass of beer." With that she pulled me inside.

The twosome welcomed me loudly, assuring me that they were happy to find someone they could talk German to. With that they began to shoot questions at me. I told them that we had lived in Brussels for many year and other lies.

The soldiers who were about twenty years old, apparently believed little or nothing of what I told them, but I did not care. After a while I was the one who asked questions, and thusly I learned that they believed France and England were about licked. In the East, the Russians had a difficult time with Finland, but one must not forget that the weather was most unfavorable there. In the meantime, Germany profited greatly from its friendship with the Russians in the form of raw materials and foodstuff...Yes, yes, of course.

An elderly Belgian stood nearby at the bar having one drink after another. With each he became a little more belligerent and talked louder and more vehemently against the Germans. He cursed them terribly measuring them daringly with a drunken glare.

I became rather uncomfortable, because the Germans who knew what he was up to, wanted my translation of the tirade. I assured them that I did not understand French well, which was true enough but which they refused to believe. Of course, I did know the gist of what he was saying.

That the landlady became visibly nervous too, was the only thing that pleased me about this situation.

The fellow had another drink, shoved his cap back and advanced towards us. I was amazed how straight he walked. Cursing, he waved his fists at the soldiers, who cursed right back in German. I made some feeble and entirely fruitless effort to calm everyone.

Then one of the soldiers drew his pistol announcing that he would not tolerate any further insults. The girls in the Café shrieked hysterically, and the landlord, who had tried to stay out of sight, felt compelled to intervene. He assaulted the drunk but larger man from behind. The ensuing brawl ended outside on the sidewalk in front of the establishment to the great pleasure of the Germans who now laughed and congratulated the landlord for his loyalty when he returned with black eyes.

To celebrate this local victory, or perhaps to make it more complete, one of the soldiers went promptly upstairs with one of the girls.

The other one gave the landlady his address and insisted that he wanted to be informed at once should the drunk ever bother her.

On June 18 another unbelievable event happened: France surrendered.

We moved to the rue Joseph Dekeyn.

German air force squadrons, on their way to bomb England, now flew often over Brussels. This spectacle did nothing for our morale which was at an all-time low.

In order to collect our welfare we had to report twice a week to the district unemployment commission. In the meantime, I apprenticed with a Jewish maker of ladies leather handbags. He was considered a true artist. His shop was in his home. I would have worked for nothing just to learn the trade, but he did pay me one franc per hour, forty-eight per week.

Without food stamps, a loaf of bread cost twenty francs at the time.

In the Fall, my employer sold everything he and his petite, vivacious wife owned, and they left for Spain. I was saddened to learn the Nazis got them before they reached their dreamed-of sanctuary.

It was impossible to live on welfare alone. We suffered from hunger and I continually looked for work.

My stepfather rented a cart and helped people move, or transported things for them. Often I had to help him.

We received our unemployment compensation in the School of Fine Arts, in the rue Potagère, where a classroom had been transformed into a temporary office. Standing in line there, I admired the beautiful drawings hanging on the walls and the sculptures in the hallways. Uncle Simon and my cousins went there also, and Ernst, who had always liked to draw, became interested in going to school there.

Ernst who spoke even less French than I did not want to go alone. He persuaded Herbert and me to go with him. Classes had already started, but we decided to try for admission anyway.

Sunday morning, the 11. October, at nine o'clock, we stood shyly in front of the Academy of St. Josse, trying to summon enough courage to walk in. It was a branch of the Royal Academy of Fine and Applied Arts which was located downtown in the rue du Midi.

A man, who looked like what we thought an artist should look like, arrived. One of the professors, we guessed. We followed him inside, and then upstairs to a very large room which was furnished to profusion with easels and plaster casts.

There were some students, most our age, who greeted the professor respectfully while glancing curiously at us. For a minute we stood there undecided, then the professor came towards us and ask us something, probably what we wanted. I apologized, in a mixture of Flemish and French, for bursting in and asked if we could enroll.

"Ah, you speak German," he said and smiled. When he smiled, his stern countenance changed to a radiant kindness.

Relieved by his unexpected friendliness we nodded in unison.

A young, tall, elegant and Jewish looking fellow, who was standing near us, turned to us, and addressing us in fluent German asked if he could be of service. He introduced the professor as Arthur Dirkx and himself as Emil Rausch. After we returned the formality, Emil explained that he too had just enrolled as a freshman.

It was not too late to enroll if we were willing to catch up with the rest of the class. There was no charge for the studies if we lived in the school's district.

The class in "Beginning Drawing" met in a classroom on the ground floor daily, except Saturday, from 7-9 p.m. On Sunday morning we met in the large studio on the second floor, where the second, third, fourth and fifth year met during the week. The sixth year of drawing met on the third floor where oil painting studios were also located. The sculptors met in the basement. There were other rooms where art-history, anatomy and architecture were taught.

The school year lasted from the beginning of October to the end of May.

We were happy to have met Emil. He was a student of languages at the University of Brussels who's interest in the arts had led him to the academy as a student. Soon we learned that despite his appearance, he was not Jewish but Protestant.

For quite a while, our drawings consisted of geometric solids. Professor Dirkx, whose appearance gave the impression of severity, was in fact kind, gentle and very patient.

We drew with charcoal on drawing paper. Freehand and life size.

For a long time I was without a doubt the worst student in our class of fifty-two.

Apparently, the professor had come to the same conclusion about my talents, because soon he paid no attention to me.

In the meantime, we had acquired one more friend. He was a Belgian Jew, by the name of Begam, whom we soon admired for his great intelligence and sweet disposition. A university student attracted to art, he not only spoke several languages, but was also a poet. Among other things, he translated Heinrich Heine into French. From my own schooldays in Vienna, I was very familiar with Heine's works and could tell that Begam did an excellent job with his translations.

Winter arrived, and those who received welfare had to furnish one member of the family to work for the city a number of days each month. On such days, I would shovel coal or sweep streets. Shoveling coal was hard work. Sweeping was not bad.

By now, I went to a public soup kitchen each day to stand in line for soup for the family.

Our food rations consisted of seven ounces per day per person of an all but inedible bread, made partially of potato peels. As the bread was heavy, seven ounces amounted to less than three slides. There was one pound of meat per month. The meat we often sold on the black-market to buy more of the bread, because it was much more filling. For a short while we also received a half a pound of butter. There was a half a pound of margarine and thirty pounds of potatoes. Over half of these were rotten. We also received two pounds of sugar, 144 small cubes to be exact, per person, and one small jar of imitation jelly, a dark red, strange tasting concoction made from coal tar. I don't remember what the amount of coffee was one received each month. It was not much and was made of toasted green peas. Vegetables were not rationed, but one could hardly find any. Rutabaga was the one most prevalent. Merchants reserved what little there was of the unrationed items for their steady customers.

My stepfather administrated our rations. He kept them under lock and key. I came out short most of the time, but whenever we ran out of food, I was promptly blamed for eating too much.

For some time, mother worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant. Occasionally, she brought home bits of food.

After that job was gone, mother began bringing home stale slices of German army bread sometimes. (Komisbrot.) I was puzzled until I discovered, to my grief, that mother spent hours in front of a German army barracks begging for bread.

We moved to a ground-floor apartment in the rue de Moulin. I was assigned the unheated attic upstairs, for which I was grateful.

There was a disadvantage to living on the ground floor, because those who did, had to scrub the sidewalk in front of the house on Friday. This, of course, became my job.

Eventually, driven by hunger and anger, I made a key to the food bin, and some times, when it seemed inconspicuous, I stole some bread or pieces of sugar, restoring in a painful manner, a ridiculous fraction of what should have been mine in the first place.

But, more often than not, I went to bed on an empty stomach. And, freezing as well as starving, I sometimes cried myself to sleep.

Once in a while, I found a piece of bread hidden under my pillow by my mother. Chances are that she knew I did not get the food ration I should. Invariably, the bread was stone hard and often moldy. But it lasted longer that way and I did not mind cutting my gums chewing it.

Emil Rausch, my new friend from the art academy, had acquired the habit of visiting us in the afternoon on his way home from the university. Before long, he slipped me his lunch which consisted of two sliced of barely buttered bread. I was very touched and embarrassed by this magnanimous gesture, and at first I refused to accept. But he swore angrily that he would throw it in the gutter if I would not take it. His modest pocket money he insisted on sharing with me also.

During the day, I helped my stepfather move people, or coal, and evenings I joined my cousins at the academy.

Eventually, Herbert and I would hang around the coal dumps, that is whenever we had time to do so, and hire our services to older people who were too weak to carry their monthly coal ration. We received one franc for every twenty-two pounds. The ration of coal consisted of 110 pounds. Boggling under those sacks on our backs we felt like collapsing at times. Now I don't know how we managed to carry these sacs. One customer a day was all we could handle. Then happy the task was done, we would try to buy something to eat.
Not that one could get much for the five francs each of us would have earned. The usual was a role made of a dark flour of uncertain origin.

At home, each meal had become a torture. My stepfather simply could not tolerate to see me eat. I was the scapegoat for his anger and frustrations. Only when he was not home did I know some peace, which was never the-less marred by my fear of his return.

I believe it was at this time that my mother and I became estranged. I resented that she did not defend me against my spoiled sister and her father. It is true that mother lived in constant fear of her rage-prone mate. Often, I felt sorry for her and yearned to embrace her, but somehow I could not get myself to do it. I wonder how and what she felt. Perhaps it is just as well that I don't know.

When in his normal mood, my stepfather, who fancied himself an expert on everything, exposed us for hours on end to his views and opinions. Not bothered by his stuttering, he could be sure of a captive audience at home. (His stutter was caused by a shell that exploded near him unexpectedly during W.W.I. when he served in the Austrian Army. He also had an war injury in one of his legs, for which, over the years he had undergone eleven operations. The medical treatments had not done much to improve his condition. He limped and walked with a cane, and had been mostly unemployed.) When not inclined to talk, he practiced his trumpet. Whenever I could, I fled to my chilly but peaceful room in the attic.

On the 17. March, 1941, we moved again. This time, just two blocks up the street to 102 rue de Moulin. The place we had lived in had been very humid. So much so that the walls were wet to the touch.

Fortunately, the new place had a similar arrangement for me than the old one. I had an attic room for myself. Also, the apartment was on the third floor which relieved me of having to scrub the sidewalk.

In the meantime, Arthur Dirkx, who through Emil Rausch had learned of our dismal condition, arranged for Margit to eat at his friends' the Van Guchts. Mr. Van Gucht, a well-known musician, taught music at the Royal Conservatory and also played the oboe for the orchestra of the RNB. (Radio Diffusion Nationale Belge). Mr. Dirkx played the Cello for the same organization. Dirkx also played with a quartet in which the Queen mother Elizabeth played the violin. This group met only at the Royal Residence in Laeken.

The Van Gucht were well off. At least as far as we were concerned they were rich. Compared to us, many people were. Anyway, the war had not reached the Van Gucht kitchen yet. I believe that these good people had relatives in the country. Many Belgians did. Such connections became invaluable to those who enjoyed them. Like most refugees we knew few people who were not also refugees.

Margit dined at the Van Gucht' almost daily. Once a week she ate with the Dirkx. The latter were far less affluent. To have a guest at their table must have meant a sacrifice. Occasionally, I was invited to the Dirkxs also. Eventually, I became their regular Sunday dinner guest.

Going to Dirkx was much more than getting food. It was a holiday for me and I used to count the days till Sunday.

They lived in a small but well appointed, art-cramped apartment, at 41, Ave. Suffrage Universel. This street, in a quiet middle-class neighborhood of small stone-facade apartment buildings, faced the park Josaphat.

The friendliness and kindness of my hosts moved me deeply. Their daughter, Monique, who was about eight years old, and Mrs. Dirkx spoke only French. Mr. Dirkx who also spoke Flemish and German, translated for us.

If I had ever been embarrassed by my linguistic shortcoming, it was then. There had been times before when I felt like an idiot, but previously, I had been content to speak Flemish. After all, we were going to leave for the USA "soon". My contact with "foreigners" had been infrequent and because Brussels was a bilingual city, my need for French had not been urgent..

At my first encounter with the Dirkx family, I finally decided to apply myself seriously to the business of learning French.

At the academy, where I had been the worst of student, I applied myself more also. The student's laughing at my work had angered me and I was going "to show them."

We were doing charcoal still life. One evening, Mr. Dirkx, who had been walking by me when he made his rounds, just shaking his head, or raising his arms in a mock gesture of despair, stopped behind me. After a moment of silently watching me, he said, "Well, Hermann, this is very good". His voice was full of surprise. At his remark, a lot of heads turned to look at me. And although I knew myself blushing, no one laughed.

My progress to becoming the best student in the class was rather rapid. The teacher was surprised and so was I. Soon my work won praise rather than criticism from Mr. Dirkx. There is nothing like success to boost morale. I found myself actually happy when I worked in class, maybe especially, because I had never hoped to be able to draw well.

A couple of years earlier, when I was still in Vienna, and was staying with my uncle Victor Kosak and aunt Tecia for a few days, Victor had suggested that I should draw something. For the purpose he had handed me paper and pencil and a photo of an old, bearded, man. After I was done, Victor had told me that I would never be an artist.

Victor (Frederick Kosak) was the family artist. He married a cousin, Theresa (Tecia) who was of Polish origin. He had studied art at the academy in Vienna, had lived in Moscow for a number of years with Tecia, while aunt Mina lived in his studio in Vienna. Shortly before the Nazis came to Austria, Victor and Tecia returned from Russia. Mina left for New York, and Victor and Tecia followed her by way of Paris.

Victor and Tecia had been unpopular in our family for being stingy. In fact, I believe now that they were just rather poor. After all, Tecia always had some sort of job at a time when it was not customary for wives to work. I liked them; also the beautiful studio in Vienna, where as a child I spent some happy hours.

Herbert did not derive much satisfaction from attending the academy. Before the first year was over, he quit.

Attending the academy, like most everything else I had ever done, did not please my stepfather. He insisted that I stop going there. Classes met from seven to nine, and I was supposed to be in bed by eight. For years I had been going to bed by eight, and there was no reason to change this routine now.

Sadly, I informed Mr. Dirkx. The professor sent a message that he wanted to talk with my stepfather. My stepfather refused and in the meantime, I continued to go to class. That cousin Ernst was going with me was probably a deterrent to my stepfather's usual explosive determination to have his way.

The reason I was to be in bed by eight was not a concern for my health. But, after I had retired to my attic room, there would be a second supper for the family. Surely this was not a routine, but occasionally, mother would come sneaking to my room in the middle of the night and quietly put a slice or two of bread on the chair next to my bed. Sometimes, the bread was buttered, sometimes there was a slice of cold cuts on it.

I kept suffering from gland infections. Had been operated four times, by regular doctors, I should add, who had returned to the hospital. Anyway, there were times I felt myself growing weak.

The attic was overrun by bed bugs. Mother helped me with elaborate schemes to get rid of them, but to no avail.

Spring finally came. One Sunday morning, I arrived at the academy with wrapping paper to work on because I could no longer afford regular drawing paper. Dirkx came up to me as I was fastening the paper to the board. With tears in his eyes he insisted I tear the wrapping paper off and go downstairs to get some drawing paper. (The concierge of the school sold art supplies to students.) From that day on, Dirkx provided me with all the materials and supplies I needed in school.

At home, we had occasional visits by an elderly German soldier of the "Luftwaffe" (Air force). He was in a guards company and swore he had no idea how he ever got into the service. Otto was a shy and gentle man who seemed to be lost. He asserted to be glad to have a place to go, other than a bar, to have a quiet cup of "coffee" and some people he could talk with in German.

How this acquaintance came about I don't know. (In those days, youngsters did not ask questions of their parents unless invited to.)

Otto was a farmer from "Sachsen". He knew we were Jewish and felt free to air his gripes with us. Sometimes he made a nuisance of himself for he would sit around for hours complaining about the war and the military.

Yet, he never made any comments about Hitler. This kept me somewhat uneasy about him, although this lack of mentioning the real cause of his predicaments could have been the result of a deep-seated fear.

But Otto was also a blessing for he seldom came empty-handed. Usually he brought some "Komisbrot" (army bread), and sometimes he handed me a few cigarettes. By that time, cigarettes had became very valuable. For a while, I gave those to Dirkx and to Emil. Then I noticed that smoking was a marvelous antidote for hunger and I began to smoke. This was done secretly of course, since smoking was considered a vice at home and I was forbidden all vices.

I have to say, that we were somewhat surprised that the Germans had not taken measures against the Jews, and we began to hope we would be left alone.

Constantly hungry, I often would dream of sitting at a table covered with all kinds of food, and I would eat. I could smell and taste the food, but never get enough. Waking from this dream was quite unpleasant.

April brought exams at the academy. These were called term contests and lasted through the month. On the second of May, my seventeenth birthday, I received a letter of congratulations from Mr. Dirkx. I had won the First Prize with distinction for the contest, for the work of the year and for the Sunday morning class, I shared the honor of the First Prize with Ernst. I also won a scholarship of 500 francs, but could not receive it because I was not a citizen.

To make these exams as fair as possible, student work was evaluated by professors of another academy in the city. (There were ten such schools, I believe.) Also, students did not sign their work, but instead put a number on it which was given to them by the secretary of the school.

I could not have received a better birthday present. However, my family received the news with an indifference which spoiled my joy. My stepfather reminded me that I was to give up all this nonsense, go out and earn my keep or I would not be fed. It was a sermon I heard now at most meals.

Somehow, my stepfather had obtained the name and address of a famous Belgian portrait painter. I was ordered to go to him, tell him that I was talented and hungry, and persuade him to give me some financial aid. Disgusted with the proposal I refused, only to be told that I would not get another bite to eat until I had seen the man. I kept refusing until I nearly got my brains beaten in. After that, I finally agreed to go. My stepfather assured me that he would find out whether or not I had talked to the man.

All went better than expected. I introduced myself to the artist who was very kind, and showed him some of my drawings. And, instead of asking him for financial support, which I couldn't possibly do, I asked him for advice concerning my intentions to take up oil painting.

When I left the artist's beautiful home and the wonderful paintings there, I was vastly relieved to have this visit behind me. At home I was bitterly reproached for returning empty-handed and was given an additional sermon on my uselessness. But by then I had developed a thick skin and remained unmoved.

At times, either we or aunt Rose received a can of sardines from our relatives in the USA. This gift came by way of Portugal and was always shrouded in a cloak of secrecy for fear that its contents would have to be shared.

At the time, mother worked for a Jewish tailor who had some "fine" customers. It was not long before I was dragged to the tailor to introduce myself as a starving artist looking for work or a handout. Since mother went with me, and since I did not care much about being embarrassed anymore, I did not engage in any useless arguments with my parents, and armed with my drawings went to see the tailor. The good man was impressed with my work, gave me 500 francs, (ca. $10.00) and invited me to come back and show him some of the paintings I was going to do.

This I promised. Of course, I handed the money to my parents. I did however persuade mother to let me have 200 francs with which to buy some materials I needed to paint, although this was not enough to get me started.

Herbert began to suffer from heart and stomach problems, and our walks, which we did now on Saturdays, became shorter and shorter. I too tired easily, and we became satisfied to visit friends instead of going on excursions.

We liked to visit the Haberfelds. They were very kind people from Vienna. The Haberfelds were old. He was a tailor and we usually found him on a stool bending over some work. We were always welcome and always received a cup of tea or "coffee" and some bread.

We met the Haberfelds through uncle Kobi who was engaged to one of their daughters. She was one of the homeliest but one of the sweetest women I have ever known. Kobi, who was now interned in France, loved her enough to forgo the opportunity he had at the beginning of the war to leave for the USA. No one saw Kobi again, and the woman did not live to cry for him either.

All this time, I was not quite as useless as my stepfather suggested. Art classes met only in the evening and on Sunday morning. This left plenty of time to do the odd jobs I mentioned earlier, such as helping my stepfather move people, working for the city and also using some of the skills I had acquired at the AREPROR. That is, I made keys and repaired locks. Also, I had begun to free-lance as an artist for a distributor of buttons. My job consisted of painting words, flowers and little objects on wooden buttons. This was done with enamel. The words would be from popular songs, and the buttons were worn on sweaters by young girls. Here are some song samples:

"In my heart, a tender hope is born..."
"On the road which goes on and on and on..."
"You stole my heart at the carnival..."

The pay was poor, but the work was a lot more fun than dragging coal. Also, there was as much work as I cared for, and to encourage me, my parents allowed me to keep ten percent of my earnings.

Of course, I felt better for contributing my share, although this did not reflect on the treatment I got. I worked longer and longer hours, and soon my share amounted to more than my stepfather made, including the welfare - now called public assistance - we received.

Summer came early and the heat proved to be exhausting. At times I saw people walk along the street and suddenly collapse. Not refugees either! They would lie there for a while until someone would take care of them.

My health had always been excellent. The infections I had were really my first serious encounter with illness. Now I could not walk very far without resting. But even though I did worry at times about this new infirmity, I did not allow myself to brood about it.

Dirkx offered to give me private lessons in watercolor. They would take place after our Sunday dinner. He also furnished the tools and materials involved.

My first lesson is one I will always remember. I even remember the weather; a mild, sunny day. Although I had experience with still life subjects, it had all been with charcoal. Now I was laboring with one pigment, Van Dyck brown, and a brush. It was more difficult than I had expected, and without Mr. Dirkx, who stood right behind me, I would have made a worse mess than I did.

When I was done, I could have cried had I not been ashamed to do so in front of Mrs. Dirkx and Monique.

However, with my second watercolor I did better, and eventually, I found the work quite pleasurable, especially when I was allowed to watch Mr. Dirkx, who painted with the ease and assurance of the master.

Sometime, in the first half on June 1941, Herbert and I received an invitation to a Jewish restaurant. It said in black and white on a piece of paper that the bearer was entitled to a free dinner. I don't remember how we got this invitation. Anyway, we went. The place run by immigrants, was located out of the way in a small street. It's owners wanted to help youngsters by offering them an occasional free meal.

We received bean soup, a baked potato and bread. At the same time, we were informed that the place needed help, and we were hired on the spot as dishwashers. I don't know what prompted me to accept that job, considering I had as much work as I wanted then. Maybe it was the idea of being where food was, the thought that I could fill myself with that stuff I had been craving so. The meals I had at home, and even those I had at the Dirkx' were always meager, modest and hardly ever satisfying.

The kitchen was in the basement. There, we washed pots, pans and dishes all afternoon for one meal of bean soup, baked potato and bread. A Jewish-German woman was the cook and her skills were rather limited. And, although she had considerable experience with the bean soup, she would manage to spoil it once in a while. On such occasions we could eat all we wanted. To throw it out would have been a sin, but we just as soon would have sinned that way after a while. I learned that to fill myself with food, was not nearly as glamorous as it seemed when I was starving.

One day, Herbert washed the dishes and I dried them, and the following day we would switch jobs. I was drying a pot when we heard of the German attack on Russia. We rejoiced in this new calamity for mankind, because we believed the Russians would defeat the Germans in no time.

All kinds of rumors sprang up immediately. One was that the Germans had begun to round up all the Jews in Brussels. Fortunately, that rumor was unfounded. The Jews were not molested.

Shortly after the German attack on Russia I was fired. The boss informed me that I looked too healthy. The opportunity to work for him should go to someone in greater need than I. Herbert was allowed to stay on.

I really was not upset about losing the job, but I did dread going hungry again.

All that dreary food seemed to have helped restore my physical stamina. Now, whenever possible, I went for long walks with Emil Rausch.

For some reason, that summer, there was an abundance of pears sold by cart-pushers downtown. Their cost was comparatively reasonable. Emil and I usually bought four pounds and ate them hungrily while we walked. On these walks, Emil instructed and drilled me in French. He also liked to talk about everything.

We had very interesting conversations, partly in German and partly in French. Slowly, more and more in French.

Our favored roaming ground was the "Bois de la Cambre". This was a large park where one could walk in the shade of trees, or lie in the grass while contemplating the wonders and problems of the world. At all times, we took ourselves very serious.

Emil, a self-proclaimed atheist, denied the existence of God. His point of view led to endless discussions. Very patiently, Emil explained how all of creation could be scientifically traced back to a simple cell that came to life a few hundred million years ago in some sort of slime.

To get that far back in time took us several afternoons in the park. Once there, it remained for us to decide where the slime came from.

While I had problems accepting divinity as it was claimed to be by established religions, I never the-less did believe in a creator. My theory was that nothing came from nothing, and then there was too much order, too many inflexible laws in nature to suggest accidental creation. We talked about seemingly insignificant small creatures, their sometimes complex life which somehow seemed to mesh into a larger complexity called life on earth.

We argued for and back for a long time. Finally, I had the satisfaction of winning Emil over to the belief in a creative force, pursuing its own purposes unknown to us.

Those hours spent in discussions were really wonderful hours which helped us to forget the war and sometimes our empty stomachs.

Margit ate at the Van Guchts all that time, and one day our whole family was invited. This was a very promising invitation because it meant that for once we would eat as before the war. Not many people could do this anymore, except in their dreams.

I should mention that the Van Gucht' had a lovely daughter about eight years old. She had very dark red hair and hazel eyes. Also the Van Gucht' had the unusual hobby of raising full sized black poodles.

Our hosts were connoisseurs of wines and we had wine with our dinner. Wine was new to me, and I found it quite delightful. Suddenly, my eyes refused to focus and I could not feel my legs. I did not dare get up, and to everyone's amusement remained at the table when everyone went to the living room. Only after we had some coffee - real coffee - did I regain the control of my legs and of my eyes.

I remember that we listened to the BBC on the radio. This was not easily done at the Dirkx because their radio was not very powerful and could not overcome the German interference. (Listening to a foreign radio station was a criminal offense.)

Leo's sister Lintschi (Karoline) lived not far from us. Her husband, Herrmann worked as a doorkeep at a wine garden (actually there was no garden) called pretentiously "The Good Viennese Grape". He was well suited for his present job as he was tall, had straw blond hair, clear light blue eyes and looked altogether physically very capable: "a perfect Aryan". In fact he had a rather shy voice and was as meek as a lamb.

These distant relatives were on my list of those I visited once in a while. During such a visit, I learned from Herrmann that he had a friend who worked as doorkeep at a nightclub behind the opera, downtown, known as the "Bar du Sud". This friend wanted to be relieved between the hours of five and midnight for a while. Would I want the job?

The situation struck me as having the flavor of mystery and adventure, and I was quite eager to accept. (As you know, the academy was closed until October.) Of course, I was supposed to be in bed by eight, but my stepfather's rule showed itself flexible when additional income was at stake.

I was immediately hired, given a white cap and was promised five francs per hour plus all the tips I would make. The following day at five, I found myself listening to the portier's (doorkeeper) last minute professional advice.

For example, there was a bell hidden by the door which I could easily reach without anyone noticing. I was to ring it twice should any kind of police show up, for there was dancing at the club located on the second floor of the building, and dancing was against the law. (German ordinance).

Should guests arrive, the bell was to be rung once as a signal for the band and the receptionist. In response to an inquiry about dancing at the club, I was to use my discretion concerning my answer.

The "Bar du Sud" was in the rue Leopold, across the street from the back of the opera, and like the opera it was a nineteen century stone-facaded building. Although not nearly as ornate as the opera, it was still a stately three story structure with a large entrance, a marble-paved hall from which a marble staircase led upstairs. The club was probably the result of recent remodeling. The owner was a Belgian, who as an obvious business ploy, had taken a (Viennese) Gestapo agent as a partner.

I was advised caution, for at times friends of the Gestapo partner dropped by, and these were Gestapo also. Oh, I was entitled to one free glass of beer per evening.

So, there I was with the opportunity to look behind the scene of night life. Actually, I would only get a glimpse, because most of the guests arrived after midnight. No doubt, those were the real interesting ones.

The drinks at the bar of the club were very expensive. A bottle of champagne went for 1000 francs, a beer for fifteen. (One dollar was approximately worth 50francs.)

When I arrived at five, the place was just opening up and all was still very quiet. Three or four musicians came and started tuning their instruments. A little later, one by one, the beautiful "ladies" who worked at the Bar du Sud began to drift in, then bartenders and finally the first of our steady customers.

The steadiest of them was a good looking if somewhat dissipated young man who left several thousand francs at the club each and every night. More than a skilled worker could make in a month.

Standing inside the doorway, I could listen to the band which was very good. It often began with French pop music, then switched to German as soon as a German guest arrived.

Between seven and eight, our young steady would appear at the top of the staircase and shout for a taxi. The first time this happened, I was taken aback. Where would I get a taxi when these were practically a thing of the past?

"Yes, Sir!" I shouted, " Right away!"

I was about to leave to see if there was a taxi in front of the opera where sometimes I had seen one, when one of the ladies came running down the stairs. She told me to wait five to ten minutes, then come upstairs and announce that no taxi could be found. She smiled and winked, and I got the message.

Sometimes, the man would forget that he wanted to leave, but ordinarily he would show up after a while, furiously take off on foot without tipping me. The ladies chirped after him "good bye darling". The darling turned invariably to throw them a kiss. The next day he would be back. This time he called on me for orchids. Well, I began to notice that there was more to being a doorkeep than I had suspected.

Between eight and nine came the Nazi-half of the ownership, saying a few words to me in a murderous French. I carefully avoided any subject not related to the weather.

In my pockets I carried the club's advertising on calling cards. In German and in French it claimed an exotic atmosphere, excellent drinks, music and "all kinds of entertainment."

Among our steady guests were some dancers who worked at the opera and who came right after their performance. Another was a Gestapo agent who came and went without paying any attention to me. Thank God.

In the hallway stood artificial palm trees, on the wall along the staircase were German posters. Sometimes, people who were already halfway up the stairs would turn and leave.

One of the ladies who worked at the bar took a liking to me. When she arrived she lingered at the door, said niceties to me, sighed deeply and sometimes she stroke or patted my cheeks before going upstairs to her domain.

I had reason to be satisfied with my position of doorkeep. The additional income would allow me to go to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels, where classes were held during the day. Tips amounted to ten to fifteen francs, although there were days when they amounted to zilch. But, with the ten percent I kept, I now could afford the art supplies I needed to paint.

From time to time, usually late in the evening, planes flew over the city, sirens wailed and guns put on a concert of their own which I enjoyed a great deal more than what the band upstairs had to offer. The war was still going on, even though one could hardly notice it at the "Bar du Sud".

One day, a guest hurried down the stairs, handed me a twenty franc tip, and rushed off. I was contemplating his generosity and telling myself that after all there were still a few nice people around, when one of the ladies called from upstairs to ask me if one of the guests had just left. I told her that this was so, and the poor lady almost fainted.

The gentleman had not paid his way. The lady was dismissed on the spot despite of her tears and curses. The band played, "Can love be sin?"

At midnight, the regular portier arrived, and I walked home through the silent, blacked-out streets. At home, I climbed as quietly as I could to my attic room (mansard). There were five or six of those, one for each apartment. These were spare rooms, about 6 x 10' ordinarily used for storage. Only two were occupied. Ours and one in which a young girl, one of our neighbor's daughter slept.

I thought it peculiar that she coughed quietly when I came home at night, and that her door was not shut. However, her cough subsided after I got to my room, and finally she got rid of it all together.

Being a portier was not a bad job. Sometimes, it was a little boring, but then it was hardly ever much of a strain. When the sun shone, I could enjoy its warm brightness. The unpleasant side of the job was that the bosses decided the portier should do some oral advertising. I was instructed to call out to people passing by that they should come inside and have a great time at the "Bar du Sud". This was difficult for me. I only dared to do so after dark, and even then I sounded rather unqualified.

At times Herbert and Ernst would walk by to see how I was doing. They kept at a distance for a while, and amused themselves by aping me when I dutifully called out to people walking by, thusly adding to my embarrassment.

One evening an unusual couple arrived. She, a stunning beauty of about twenty-five, apparently self-conscious and shy, and he a homely big slob about twice her age. It was just getting dark. Several guests were already upstairs dancing. I am sure it was past nine o'clock, because the flower girl had come by, and she always came shortly before nine. The band played a familiar sentimental tune, a German song I remembered from childhood. Something about kissing blue eyes, caressing soft hair under a friendly moon.

Night descended. The opera over, a throng of music lovers flowed for a short while through the otherwise quiet street. Those walking by the club, were properly shouted at by me about the marvels at the "Bar du Sud."

Then the crowd subsided and I contemplated with much longing the faraway stars that hung in profusion from a very black sky.

It got to be late. Soon I would go home. The night's chill became imposing and I slipped into my raincoat to keep from freezing.

Upstairs, the dancing and singing became livelier as the night went on. Occasionally a female would shriek or laugh hysterically.

I thought of the millions who were starving and the blood that was flowing. Here it was alcohol. As per usual, my reflections managed to sadden me.

Suddenly, a woman came dashing down the stairs. Despite of the dark, I recognized the stunning beauty who had arrived earlier with the big slob. When she reached me I noticed that she was trembling. In her beautiful large brown eyes was some sort of fear. Her hair was undone and her blouse was torn, revealing the outlines of perfectly shaped breasts. Also, she was drunk.

"A taxi!" she hissed, "Please get me a taxi!"

"Dear Miss," I said, "taxis are rare, and after eight, there are none to be found."

While I spoke, she had taken a hold of my arm and dragged me with her to the street. Apparently, she had not heard me, for she repeated her wish for a taxi, adding that she was afraid and would I take her home. She was still trembling and held on to me as if I were her last hope.

For a moment I hesitated. Damn it all! Had she come but a half hour later, I would have taken her to the end of the world if she wanted me to. But could I quit my post? Yet, I had to do something. She kept pleading with me while pulling me to the street, and I went with her. Her perfume was murder. Besides, I certainly could not trust this woman to the dark of the night. To hell with the bar! "A la guerre comme à la guerre."

Dizzily I walked her away from the object of her distress.

I asked her where she lived, and she named a street that sounded familiar. I decided to take her to the streetcar terminal at the stock exchange, only a couple blocks away. Surely, there I would be able to find out how to get her home. As the distance between us and the club increased, she became calmer, although she still clung to my arm for dear life. This was not unpleasant, but my arm began to ache.

"I am so glad you were there, Henri," she whispered. "It's all so terrible," she sighed.

I insisted she button her overcoat. We stopped, and as I helped her with her coat she dropped her purse. A golden wrist watch and a bundle of money fell from it. I got her to release my arm and returned the stuff to her purse. How careless of her, I thought. With all that money in her purse, she entrusted herself to a total stranger. Drunk too! Too drunk to know how to get home.

I took her by her arm, feeling sorry for her, and we walked on.

She did call me Henri. Still, that was a common name.

"Tell me, where do you know me from?" I asked her. She looked at me closely, our faces less than one inch apart. "Are you not Henri?"

"Maybe you mean someone else."

She rubbed her head against my shoulder. "No, no, you rascal you! You want to scare me. Just because I drank a little you are angry with me. Please don't be angry!"

"I am not angry," I said somewhat irritated, experiencing troubles breathing.

"Then kiss me!" she ordered and stopped. We stood under a blacked-out gas lantern that threw but the faintest strand of light. She drew herself against me, her hands pulling at the lapels of my coat. Her face was almost touching mine. How beautiful she was! My heart was beating furiously. I could hardly breath, but I did not kiss her. Why I will never know.

She had smiled shyly, waiting. Suddenly, her facial expression changed. She must have noticed that I was not the Henri she had in mind, and I admit to a feeling of disappointment.

She withdrew a little. "You are from the police, no?"

I was surprised. "Me? Why do you think that?"

"You have a white cap."

"Yes a white cap," I said somewhat bitterly, feeling suddenly the world that separated me from her. "I am sorry to have to tell you that I am not your Henri, but only the portier from the Bar du Sud. Don't you remember?"

She looked at me intensely. I saw her eyes sobering. Behind her, on a wall across the street, a clock claimed five minutes to midnight.

"Please take me home anyway," she suggested quietly. We walked on. "You know, poor Henri is Jewish also," she said, "Terrible. He had to give up his studies."

Also Jewish? I thought. Had she recognized me as one? My lousy French?

When we reached the place de Broukere, there were still people and streetcars. There was no reason for me to take her home. I would lose my job.

" Which streetcar do you have to take?" I asked.

" I don't know...oh, this one!" She pointed to one which had just pulled up. The car was crowded. I helped her on, and before either of us could say another word, it took off.

Sadly, I returned to the club. Not a soul in sight. I hoped my absence had not been discovered. I wondered why the regular doorkeep had not shown up yet, when things became lively once more. Now the escort of the strange beauty, I had just taken to the streetcar, came tumbling down the stairs.

Obviously upset, he inquired if I had seen the young lady... That is, I guessed what he wanted, for in his excitement he talked Italian. Then he repeated in French. The event seemed to have a funny side to it after all.

"Yes", I said with dignity, "the lady just left."

"Oh, oh," he wailed and hit his head with his fists. " Which way, quick tell me!"

"This way," I said pointing down the dark street. "She turned right at the first corner."

He moaned again, thanked me and ran into the night.

From the other side my relief came. He asked me to stay a few more minutes so he could have a beer before going on duty. No sooner had he gone upstairs, when two German soldiers in the company of one of the ladies came down. She, the one who had something of a crush on me, suggested to the soldiers a tip for the doorkeep. The one she had talked to elbowed the other and said in Viennese, "Go ahead Franzl and give the fellow something." Franzl obeyed.

"Bonsoir Monsieur," I said dryly.

"Bonsoir", said Franzl, "Ah, one more kiss my kitten."

He turned to the girl and she kissed him. Then the soldiers left and the kitten turned to me and sighed. I did not want her to see the mixture of disgust and pity I felt, so I turned to the street and stared at the sky. Suddenly, the girl seized me by the arm and turned me around.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Despise me if you wish, but please don't hate me!"

I shrugged, and before I could do anything about it, she fell around my neck and kissed me. I pushed her a little less gently than intended. She stumbled back, cried out softly, gave me a hurt look, turned and ran upstairs.

Going home that night, I decided that for one evening I had had enough excitement. Of course, I could not know that it was the last night I worked at the Bar du Sud.

The next morning, the German Hi-Command for Belgium and northern France announced a curfew for all Jews at eight p.m. Violations were to be punished. The purpose of the curfew was to fight the ever growing black market. (The latter continued to grow.)

Jews felt uneasy about the new measure against them. And of course, they knew the Nazis and knew what was coming. Slowly, things would get worse. The Germans had a system. One step at the time - relentlessly until it would be all over for the Jews.

Interestingly enough, the Germans always felt it necessary to have some sort of excuse for what the were doing, even when the excuse was a flimsy ill-concealed lie.

Following this first official ordinance against the Jews, all was to be peaceful for a while.

Personally, I was wondering if this was the end of my career as an art student.

There was talk about a possible emigration to Palestine. Those interested were to report to an office at the Dutch synagogue on the avenue de Regence. Volunteers were to be send to a camp to be trained for life and work in Palestine.

Mother went with me for an interview. The interviewer was skeptical about my talents for pioneering in the desert. However, he offered assistance should I be interested in some other endeavor. So, I told him about my wish to go to the Royal Academy of Brussels. To my surprise, the man thought my desire quite reasonable. All he wanted was an affidavit confirming my talents as student of art. Mr. Dirkx wrote me a beautiful recommendation and it was decided that I should enroll as a student of commercial art. Fine art was ruled out as not worth the investment. Still, I was quite happy with the deal. (After the war, I heard that those who went to train for life in Palestine were sent to a concentration camp instead.)

I remembered the times I had walked by the Royal Academy with awe and yearning, and now I should become a student there. Well, first I would have to pass the entrance exam.

The rest of the summer was spent on long walks, usually with Emil and sometimes with Herbert. Of course, most of my time I was painting buttons. I also had begun to decorate metal waste baskets.

Herbert taught me to ride a bicycle. We had rented one for an afternoon, and Herbert had assured me that there was nothing to it. On a street that obligingly went downhill, I got on the bike, began to pedal and took off. It was a little hair-raising at first. Here I grazed a pedestrian, there a car. Finally, I wound up in a streetcar track after having tried hard not to. In the excitement I had forgotten how to stop. Many bikes had no hand brakes in those days, and to stop one had to reverse the pedal motion.

Everything happened quickly. Before I knew it, I was on the sidewalk using the wall of a building for brakes. However, I am happy to say that I went through my apprenticeship without serious injuries.

A large motion picture-house on the Boulevard Anspach had been confiscated by the occupant. It was for the exclusive use of German personnel. Naturally, they did not pay to go there. The service personnel was Belgian. Because we still had our old (expired) German passports, Margit and I went to see a free movie now and then. All we had to do, was to flash our passports, German eagle and swastika on its cover, and the door was respectfully opened for us. On the inside of the passport cover was the word JEW stamped in tall red letters, but no one looked inside.

We sat between officers and soldiers in the well attended cinema. There were but few civilians. Thusly, we got to see the latest German newsreels and German movies. The newsreels showed battles which always turned out well for the Germans, and always earned cheers from the audience.

Finally, the first of October came, the first day at the Royal Academy downtown in the rue du Midi. It was entrance exam day.

The building was old and blackened by time. Several hundred years ago, it had been a convent. The entrance led to a hallway lined with Greek and Roman sculptures. The classrooms were large and had large windows, but still there was an inherent darkness in the place. Ernst, who had also obtained the synagogue sponsorship, had come with me and we decided to stick together.

The class supervisor handed out the assignment. Quite nervous about the whole affair, we made our way to the already crowded work tables. But, as it turned out, the exam was not nearly as tough as expected. All we had to do was a comprehensive design for a textile.

Mine turned our to be red roses on a pink background. Halfway done, I had second thoughts about my choice of colors, but it was too late to start over. I don't remember what Ernst did.

We had four hours and having finished early, I passed the time studying the students and the professor.

Most of the students seemed from the upper middle class. They were well dressed and in general had an air of non-chalance about them, that suggested a secure and well fed existence to me.

The professor was a small, cocky looking man who suffered from a slight speech impediment and thin hair that hung down straight and long in the back of his head. Occasionally, he would quickly run his fingers through his hair. His name was Lèon Devos and those who knew him also knew that his favored color was blue. Before long, more and more students worked with blue.

Yes, both Ernst and I passed the entrance exam.

Now, Herbert, Ernst and family, lived only one block from us also on the rue de Moulin. So, Ernst and I walked the almost one hour walk to school together. Fortunately, the weather was gorgeous that Fall of 1941.

Classrooms were locked until eight o'clock sharp. Students stood in line in the hallways discussing with great vitality whatever students discuss. Ernst and I kept much to ourselves not only because we were that shy, but especially because we were self-conscious about our French.

When the class supervisor unlocked the door, a wild scramble for chairs took place. There were more students than chairs, an incentive for learners to come to class on time. Because I felt it beneath my dignity to scramble for seating, I spent most of my time in class on my feet. This was not always easy since I often did so on an empty stomach.

In Belgium as well as in Austria, and maybe in other countries also, many people eat two breakfasts. There is a beverage and a roll, after one gets up early in the morning, than one eats again at ten o'clock. So, at ten, there was a break and students ate their second breakfast. Eggs, ham and snow white bread appeared from paper bags and briefcases. The kind of food Ernst and I had neither seen nor eaten in a very long time. He and I were the only ones who never ate at ten. Many of the students had more than they could eat, yet no one offered us anything. "Esprit de corp" was only in evidence when it came to horseplay and jesting. Smelling the food was painful, but I was pleased with myself for not envying anybody. I don't know about Ernst. We never discussed the eating breaks.

Before long, I was the best student in class. My relationship with the others was one of "hello" and "good-bye" with the exception of two girls who had a curiosity about us. One was Anny Van Dyck, the other was her good friend Jacqueline Junts. Both were blond, had a happy disposition and were a little flirty.

We became acquainted one day when Ernst and I overtook them walking home while one of them was putting on lipstick. In a low voice, Ernst and I exchanged some words, in German, about the girls. Anny had overheard us and told us so. She spoke German. We expressed our surprise at her linguistic talent and apologized for our sarcasm, but fortunately, the girls had not been offended.

Because quite a few of the sixty students in our class had gotten into the habit of coming and going as they pleased, the class supervisor got into the habit of having roll call sometimes during the morning.

I listened carefully to the names called for shades of Jewish or German backgrounds.

The name of Ilse During was about as German as could be. It seemed to me that we should keep an eye on that one.

I was now a second year student at the evening school of the Academy of St. Josse. Classes met still from seven to nine PM, and according to the curfew for Jews, I was supposed to be home by eight. But we lived only a couple of blocks from the academy, and it was easy to slip through the dark streets unnoticed.

Jacobs was my professor now. He was a sculptor and musician who taught drawing and sculpture. Tall, stern and humorless, Jacobs looked always as if he was about to ask a question.

Some evenings, after class, I would stop in Dirkx' class to say hello. On Sunday mornings I went to one of the painting classes, taught by a Jacques Maes, to work in watercolor. (At the time I still could not afford oils.) Maes did not want any watercolor in his class. But Dirkx intervened on my behalf, and although I was allowed to go on in Maes' class, the latter never forgave me for this imposition. He ignored me completely and demonstrated his dislike for me whenever possible.

Well, I tried not to care. Actually, the man was a very good painter of considerable repute. Physically he was not very attractive because he had some sort of skin problem that kept his face in an inflamed red. He also had dull, blue, slightly cross-eyed eyes behind round, metal-framed glasses. Never the-less, he was exceedingly popular with art critics who always praised his painting to the heavens. Later I was told that Maes gave cocktail parties for critics, presented them with paintings, and had them picked up with a car to bring them to his shows. Later, I also found out that Maes and Devos were good friends which probably explained the latter's cooling off towards me.

Every second Sunday I went to Dirkx for dinner. (Noon meal). This was always a festive occasion for me, although the food shortage had become very apparent at their table also. At home it was close to catastrophic. Our main stable was rutabaga boiled in water. Two or three times a week we ate potatoes and lettuce, and occasionally we had salt herring and potatoes. I don't think I would have minded had there been enough of any of it.

Another gland infection was operated on. This entailed a fever now and my arm was wrapped in a sling. But I continued to go to school although I was beginning to get weak again. Fortunately, as a student I was excused from work for the city and from reporting twice a week to the welfare office.

School was more to me than just a place for study. I could rest my nerves there. This may sound peculiar considering the restlessness of the student body, but being with them was much better than being at home where constant friction wore me out. At school I was allowed to forget the bleak realities of my existence for several hours each day.

The supervisor sat behind his desk in front of the class. The professor, of course, was not there. He only appeared two, three times a week for short periods of time. Never early in the morning.

I plunged into my assignments, usually a poster. Posters were the most common form of advertising at the time.

Students entertained themselves loudly while they worked. Girls giggled, someone sang. The most popular song was, " Anatola, belle étoile qui passe..." Voices joined, some whistled.

Occasionally, the croaking voice of the supervisor tried to restore quiet and order. The noises did not bother me. It was the friendly noise of young people, living. I was able to relax, forget my physical and mental pains. I almost became a part of the group.

Only the arrival of the professor plunged the class into a temporary, respectful silence.

We did meet Ilse During, a skinny, small, not physically attractive creature who spoke in short hard sentences accompanied by short, brisk gestures. She walked in the same direction we did when going home, and eventually, we walked together. Originally, the child of Jewish immigrants from Cologne, Germany, she, her sister and her parents had themselves baptized, out of deep religious conviction.

While Anny and Jacqueline were good classroom friends, I dated Ilse once in a while, usually to go with her to a free concert or to an art gallery. She was very talkative and knew how to keep a conversation going. After a while, I was invited to visit her at home.

Ilse lived with her mother, her younger sister, her aunt and the latter's husband, who was a German, exiled from Germany because he had married a Jewess. Baptism did not count as far as the Nazis were concerned. If I ever knew, I can't remember what happened to Ilse's father. Anyway, her uncle, the German, did have a position with the occupation forces as a supervisor of a large garage where German vehicles were maintained and repaired.

My friendship with Ilse eventually went to pieces because I was inclined to discuss religion. The final blow was a poem I wrote which apparently hurt her feelings beyond repair. She refused to talk to me after that. I've forgotten what the poem was about.

The Winter of 1941 was the hardest and the most painful I remember. It was terribly cold. We had little heat and sat around bundled up in our warmest outdoor clothing. The situation at home was unchanged. The decorator's business being seasonal, had fallen off and I was obliged to transport coal to contribute at home. We often had only bouillon for dinner. One bouillon cube to a pot of water.

When I could, I visited aunt Rose and family. (Uncle Simon, Herbert, Trude, Hertha, Ernst and little Rita.) As you know, they lived just up the street from us. Should they be eating when I was there, they invariably would offer me a bite which did not fail to embarrass me, because they lived much in the same misery we did. But my hunger was greater than my shame for accepting, and I swallowed my tears with the soup or the piece of bread.

My head was heavy, my legs as if of lead. I had hissing noises in my ears. Everything seemed unreal at times, and I was constantly tired. I would walk in the street when suddenly my legs would give way and I would have to sit down where I was on the sidewalk. The gray stones around me threatened to turn in circles. I could not walk for more than two blocks before I had to sit down. I lost control over my bladder and had to urinate as soon as the need announced itself.

It used to take us nearly one hour to walk home from the academy, now it took us nearly two. Ernst was not as run down as I, and I was glad to have his company.

Starting on the way home one day, I notices that I had lost a glove. I have rarely been as distressed as I was then. We made our way back home very carefully the way we had come, looking for the glove. We did not find it, but about half way home, I found another one. It was the right size and almost the same color. Maybe the person who lost that one found mine. Not only was I happy, but I thought the find was a good omen.

As long as I could walk at all, I was determined to continue to go to school. But, one day that gruesome winter, Ernst and I were called to the director's office where we were informed that the Germans had just passed a new ordinance according to which Jews had to be expelled from all schools.

More than a little upset, we spent the rest of the morning packing. The student body seemed unusually quiet, but no one spoke to us.

Then we walked once more between the Greek and Roman statues in the hallway downstairs, for what I thought was the last time, fighting tears.

At the academy of St. Josse, that evening, I was called to the director's office also. (Ernst had quit the evening school when the curfew for the Jews went into effect.) Knowing what was coming, I had already put my few things together and was ready to leave.

The director of the academy was a faculty member chosen for the directorship by the faculty for a limited period of time. I believe four years. The director at that time was also my professor Jacobs. I should say, my former professor, because, on his recommendation, I had been allowed to skip most of the second year of drawing and had been transferred to the third year - portrait - taught by professor Van Her.

All drawing classes, except the first year, met in the same studio on the second floor. Jacobs had left the class a few minutes before the secretary came to call me.

At his desk when I entered his office, he rose and said,

"As far as I know, there are no Jews in this school. Not for the remainder of this school-year anyway."

Van Her was a tall, skinny man with droopy shoulders. Elderly, maybe in his fifties. He had a large, pointed nose, sharp and fiery light gray eyes, a thick white mane of hair which at one time had been blond. What impressed me most about him was the dignity of his bearing. Also, he was an excellent painter. Like most Belgians I met, he was quiet, reticent and hard to know.

Van Her would give you a chance with your drawing, let you explore your problems and your mistakes. Then his criticism was clear and to the point.

I knew, from Dirkx, that Van Her's only son, a Belgian air-force officer, was in prison, having been caught by the Germans as he tried to escape to England. Before long, he was condemned to death and executed.

Van Her was gone for a few days. When he returned he was thinner and even quieter than before.

Now I left the school a quarter to eight to be home by eight. Because I worked fast, I did not fall behind.

I went to the Jewish Committee, at the Dutch synagogue, to report my dismissal from the Royal Academy. From someone there, I received the address of a button dealer who was looking for an artist to decorate buttons in the manner I described earlier. Contributing more at home, earned me a little more peace. For one gross of buttons I received 35 francs, the price of a loaf of bread on the black market. I could do not more than one gross a day, and only if I pushed myself. With the first money I received, however, I had to buy paints, brushes and varnish. Also, delivery and pickup would make me lose a day of work.

Soon, I found out that I was paid half the current rate, but when I talked about this to my employer, he refused to adjust my earnings. Instead, he told me that he knew me to be Jewish and that therefor he was doing me a favor. This kindled my anger and I quit.

The reaction to my rash act was unpleasant at home, even though I was not entirely out of work and contributed more than my share.

I cannot remember that my stepfather ever held a regular job. Even when I was a mere child, we practically lived off the alimony my father paid.

For the first time in my life I was angry enough to do something about the constant unpleasantness I suffered at home. I was going to leave, and actually rented an attic room. However, Emil Rausch, who felt sorry for my mother and her unhappiness since I had announced my decision, made me change my mind. Not easily, I must say.

My physical discomfort and weakness, being unable to walk far, being always hungry, had soured my disposition.

At the time, although I seemed to have overcome the gland infections, I began to develop open sores on my legs. These started as small red pimples which after a while would itch furiously while turning blue and growing to the size of a nickel. Then a head would form, burst and leave an open wound. This opening was wet and would get wide enough for me to stick my little finger in to the depth of about a quarter inch. So, I went back to the hospital where a doctor told me that the cause of these holes was under-nourishment. He prescribed an A and D ointment and told me to eat better. This produced yet another quarrel at home where my stepfather claimed that I was already consuming three times my share. The doctor was an idiot and I criminally inclined for reporting such obvious lies.

Fortunately, the ointment helped, and the holes slowly healed and disappeared.

In the Spring of 1942 also, the Germans ordered all Jews to register with an organization they had created: The Association of Jews in Belgium.

Because this meant that the Germans would have a handy reference to all the Jews in Belgium, there was much concern. What would happen to us before the war was over? Who would see the end of it, an end that was not anywhere in sight. Along the coast, the English struck occasionally one or another German fortification. How this may decide the war was a mystery.

What happened in Africa, where the English and the Germans chased each other over the desert, seemed equally inconsequential to the outcome of the war. And then there was Russia! God what a disappointment that was! So far, one after the other, our hopes had turned to thin air. And in the meantime, the situation became more critical for us Jews with each passing day.

The early morning sun shed a hard white light. It hurt my eyes to look at the snow still covering the pavement in the street.

Having joined a queue for some fresh herring, I had stood in line since before three in the morning. Now the sun was up, I was freezing terribly, my head was buzzing, and snow had seeped through the holes in my shoes. My feet were wet and it seemed as if the icy water in my shoes was climbing up my bones. I leaned against the wall of a building, surrounded by people, all waiting for one herring per person. Conversation had long been exhausted. People stumped their feet and rubbed their hands and swung their arms in an effort to keep warm.

I had not the energy to move around. I was thinking of the Summer that should come before long and should make life easier. The people around me were ordinary people, ordinary Belgians. Not everyone had relatives in the country and misery was common to those who did not. Stores had been stormed. Hostages had been taken.

The Germans had ways and means to deal with such foolishness.

The mayor of St. Josse, Peeters, had notices posted declaring that there were no potatoes for the population because the Germans had confiscated them for their own use. One evening, shortly after the notices had gone up, he was assassinated in his home by "unknown criminals".

On rare occasions we received letters from my mother's sisters in the USA. They came by way of Portugal and were always the same pleasant words. Still, they were received with much pleasure. After all, they showed that we were not forgotten. Or perhaps they took our thoughts momentarily to another world where there was a good life and where there was a freedom which we had already difficulties remembering, except in dreams. But the pleasure derived from the messages from America lasted hardly longer than it took to read them.

Well, the day will come when this war's nightmare will be over. Certainly, certainly.

The store had opened and slowly the queue moved. I stared at the other side of the street which was bathing in the sun. I had never seen such a bright sun. My eyes ached and red spots danced before them.

We had come very close to leave for America. If it had not been for the corrupt American Consul in Vienna, we would be there now. There was a quota for immigrants from Austria. It was one person a day! People whose papers were in order had to wait their turn. But because the consul sold visas under the table, those waiting for their turn did not have much of a chance.

I wondered if the sun was warmer and friendlier in America than in this God-forsaken Europe. A few Jews did get there, even some from our family. Aunt Mina from Vienna. Victor and Tecia from Paris. Fritzi, Edith and Elise from Amsterdam. Julius had left from Brussels. I had gone with him to the Consul in Antwerp several times for he wanted to take me with him. Julius had quickly seen through those people at the consulate! He would rent clothing, including shoes, derby and gloves, and he would stuff his billfold with play money. He cut a handsome figure when we strode into the consulate! I was so proud of him because he looked much more like a consul than the consul who treated him with a respect rarely seen.

The sun glittered. So bright and yet so somber. Strange... I listened to the grating noise my coat made rubbing against the wall as I sank slowly to the ground.

"God damn it, grab him!" someone shouted and I felt myself being picked up.

I had not lost complete consciousness and was back on my feet in a few minutes. Some people half walked, half carried me to the head of the queue into the store. In the middle of it was a small iron potbelly stove gleaming red with heat. People fussed over me for a minute. A woman rubbed my arms and neck while telling me that I was going to be fine.

Then I showed the four IDs I had with me, got the four herrings I had been waiting for, and was sent on my way.

Apparently, some adjustment in my body had caused this momentary breakdown while I had waited for the herrings. From that day on I did no longer suffer from hunger, from a ravenous lust for food, but instead, if I went long without eating, I would be noticeably nervous and get a headache.

For my eighteenth birthday, I received the First Prize with Distinction from the Academy of St. Josse. Arthur Dirkx wrote to me on this occasion, "It is a reward which warms one's heart despite the present difficulties of life. My congratulations."

In the present difficulties of life I felt blessed to have such friends as Dirkx and Emil. Of course, it was also good to see one's work crowned with success. It was an invaluable boost to my morale.

From the Jewish Committee I had received another address where I should get work. I had been given the impression the place was a commercial art studio. Naturally, I was disappointed to find plates and vases were decorated there instead. One had to be able to paint long straight lines on curved surfaces and little bunches of flowers. I took a test and got the job.

The studio was about the size of a large double garage. It was quite dusty and not very clean. Piles of porcelain dishes and glass vases took up much of the space. Quite a few windows provided good light.

The boss was a middle-sized, middle-aged man of a happy disposition. The foreman was a skinny, bend, older man whose eyes were turned outward giving his narrow face a peculiar expression. He only could see with one of his eyes and his name was Victor. There were other employees, most somehow related to the boss. Two men in their twenties, a woman in her forties who was a hunchback and not much over four feet tall; and there was a young woman recently married, who daily reported on her sex life and ask Victor for advice on how to cope with her bedroom problems, as if this was the most natural thing to do. I must say that we all enjoyed these daily reports tremendously.

The porcelain decorating business was good, and before long, my cousin Ernst and a teen-ager named Angela joined the work force.

Each one of us had a small dusty table to work on. The boss handed out designs and assigned piles of dishes. We began to work waiting for the married woman's morning report. We never had to wait long and after that we all were in a pretty good mood. Suddenly, old Victor, in a terribly croaking voice would sing a long forgotten love song. That was precious. Then when he tired of that, we would relate the latest jokes. Spicy ones only, of course.

The pay was five francs per hour. That is, we were paid by the piece, but the boss made sure earnings did not exceed that amount. Fourty francs a day, which was the price of one loaf of bread on the black market by that time.

For lunch we ate at the studio whatever we had and drank "ersatz" coffee made from toasted peas. The food situation had eased a little and I usually had a couple of slices of bread to eat. When the weather was pleasant enough, we spent our noon break in the small courtyard between the house and the shop.

The boss and his wife liked to sing. These two had fine voices and harmonized well. After I began bringing my mouth organ to play with the singers, Angela started giving me the eye and shortly thereafter a photo of herself. Perhaps she would have given me even more, but I spoiled my chances in a hurry. Well, all I can say is that I was definitely not experienced in relationships with the opposite sex.

One bright morning, an excited boss told us that he had caught the crippled woman in his basement stealing, and had fired her. She informed us that the boss had tried to rape her. Being proud of her virginity, she had preferred not to subject herself to the boss' sudden advances and he, furious at being rejected, fired her.

The entire scene was really comical because the alleged victim was rather repulsive to behold, while the boss had an uncommonly attractive young wife.

Slowly the event moved from our minds, but not without having caused much ado and mirth. Because what really happened had only the four walls of the basement for witness, the boss did not realize his threats to go to court.

Business began falling off because hand-painted dishes seemed to have been a passing fad, and we feared unemployment. For a while our boss tried hand-painted toys and then also buttons, and then we were out of work.

At the time, Arthur Dirkx had an exhibition of paintings at an art gallery called the "Regent". I visited his show almost daily and was happy when he sold one of his beautiful watercolors. As a matter of fact, this show sold out. One of the paintings was purchased by the Queen mother. (I don't know why we called her the Queen mother, as she was really the king's mother.) Dirkx knew that I was looking for work and introduced me to one of his numerous acquaintances who came to his exhibition, and who worked for studio "Hella" where metal objects were decorated. Mostly waste baskets.

The man's recommendation did get me a job there. Twice a week, I went to the studio to deliver and pick up work. This I carried around in a large old suitcase. But, just then the Germans began to organize raids in the streets to catch black marketers. If a Jew was caught the much the better. He was arrested even if he carried no forbidden merchandise. To travel with a large suitcase was pushing my luck. I had to give up this job.

My sister, Margit had become ill. She coughed and had a fever. The district's doctor for the poor was fetched. According to him, Margit had the flu and should stay in bed drinking lots of warm tea until she was better. When he returned to check her one week later, her flu was worse. Margit vomited and coughed terribly. The doctor thought she needed more rest. He was lucky he got away from my stepfather who was more than just a little upset.

The doctors among the Jewish refugees who were not allowed to practice, sometimes gave advice and helped other immigrants. Dr. Herschkowitz, a pediatrician, was one of these. In Vienna he had practiced at a large clinic. Now, of course, he was just a poor devil like the rest of us. Occasionally, he would earn a few francs from those who felt the need to turn to him for help. Often, his help was free.

He was an acquaintance of an acquaintance and he came to examine Margit. He made a long face and told us that Margit should be in a hospital for a few days for "nothing serious." We were to recall the welfare doctor and have him listen to a certain spot on Margit's back.

While my stepfather dashed off to get that "quack" to come back, I told Dr. Herschkowitz the story of my gland infections. It so happened that a new one was on its way. The doctor looked at it, nodded and suggested I get a medication called "Prontalbin" and left.

That same afternoon, Margit was rushed to the hospital with pneumonia and fell in a comma when she arrived there. She stayed longer than just a few days, and then was taken to the convalescence hospital in Linkebeek. From there she was lucky to be sent to the resort town of "Spa" to a rest home for not less than three month!

The day after I began taking "Prontalbin", there was a noticeable improvement in my latest gland infection. In less than a week it was gone never to return.

One day, in one of the narrow and dark streets of the city's center, I met a former student of the "AREPROR". We greeted each other and asked each other how we had been. This was how I learned something about the transport of refugees to France. This former fellow student of mine had been one of those who like myself had been interned on the first day of the German invasion of Belgium. Unlike myself, he had stayed with the prisoners who were sent off to France. "They treated us like animals," he said, " Here in Brussels we were loaded on freight cars which then were sealed. I don't know how many they put in each car, but one could hardly move. Fortunately, some of us had managed to hide their pocket knives when searched and were able to make some holes in the sides of the cars. Despite of this, several of us suffocated. The heat was unbearable. Of course, we received nothing to drink or to eat. And there was no toilet.

" We were on that train for days, being moved all over the map from railway station to railway station. Some were close to insanity from thirst and distress. Finally, some did lose their mind when the train was bombed.

Then the French unsealed the cars and let us out. By then we could hardly move. They used bayonets on us to get us going. I was stabbed in one of my kidneys, and after we got to the prison camp, I was taken to a dispensary."

He grew quiet. His face reflected the anxiety of recalling. I did not want to press him, but after walking with me for a while, he continued:

"In the camps, they did not treat us like humans either. We starved constantly. They fed us some tepid water which was supposed to be soup, and some bread. The only thing we had in abundance were rats. I finally escaped and made my way back to Brussels."

There was much I would have liked to ask him. While I contemplated whether or not this would be rude of me, we already parted.

The brief account about being a prisoner of the French saddened me as I thought of those relatives who had been taken to these camps.

A newspaper ad brought me to the studio "Laura" located in one of the narrow streets downtown where the sun never seemed to reach the pavement. Its tall windows led to a narrow courtyard, where all one could see were ancient brick walls.

Studio Laura specialized in hand painted silk hankies. Over bunches of flowers, fine script tenderized the sentiment:

"I love you forever" or "I dream of you" and so on.

Then a gold relief border was put around the hanky, and it was ready for its romantic destination.

The border was put on in a separate room, about three times the size of the studio. Borders were made of a thin putty over which bronze dust was blown which not only stuck to the putty but to everything. The girls who applied the dust wore masks, but I wondered how much that helped, for although I did not enter the bronzing room, when I got home I was covered with the stuff.

The pay for decorators was seventy centimes per hanky. To begin with, I made ten to twelve a day, but eventually I managed seventy to eighty depending on the design.

There were six artists and the boss. We faced the windows, working at two rows of individual tables. I sat in the center of the second row and the boss sat behind me. He was a genuine character and a great cynic. Perhaps he got that way writing tender messages, because that was his specialty.

He was tall and slim with a permanently tanned skin, and the look of a person who just realized that he has lost something. His movements were gauche and he had a habit of walking somewhat like an ape, although he was far from being one. His voice, hollow and deep, yet hard, could flip from one octave to another at will. I believe that his mannerism was affected. Anyway, when one first met him, one could easily be deceived into thinking one was facing a slightly demented oaf.

Jean, a solid, tall, round-faced farmer who kept his very blond hair very short, sat at the table in front of me. He was about twenty and a happy sort, also the fastest of us all, he produced a hundred decorated hankies a day with ease and more when he wanted.

To Jean's right sat André, a small fellow with a small mustache, who was equipped with a weak voice and raw nerves. It was said of him that he kissed too much. His work was rather mediocre, and because he was always tired he hardly decorated more than forty hankies a day.

To Jean's left worked Therese, the oldest in the group, who was never the-less a fountain of energy and vitality. Her work was of the best quality. She also was a fast worker. She was married.

Lilly, who cut the hankies from roles of silk, worked at the table to my left. Quiet, broody, she was a little on the heavy side, but very attractive. Her soft brown eyes reminded me of the eyes of a deer, and her hair was of the same color, though a shade darker. Her manners, skin and voice were very feminine. When I rested, I refreshed myself watching Lilly.

At my right worked a young country girl. The poor thing was cross-eyed. Also, she somehow looked unclean and vulgar. Even the sound of her voice was unpleasant.

At "Lora" the boss started each day with an inventory of hankies and supplies. He seemed to have a hard time convincing himself that nothing was missing. The rest of the morning was usually slow and dull. We worked quietly, trying to warm up to the design at hand.

Everyone went out for lunch except Jean and I. There was not much one could hope to find to eat, but I suppose the important thing for my coworkers was to get out and stretch legs.

Neither Jean nor I were great self-starters when it came to conversing, and usually we ate our lunch quietly.

Invariably, however, in the afternoon, when we entertained each other with stories and jokes, the studio came to live. Jokes were strictly clean when our part-time worker Lilly was around.

My stories were sure to be a hit, apparently because of my French which I was told was irresistible. I enjoyed making Jean laugh, for his laughter was clear as a bell and made me feel good. The boss never laughed out loud. He preferred a soundless grin which exposed large yellow teeth. Sometimes, when the general merriment had died down, he would, in his hollow deep voice mimic us with a couple of *ho hos*.

The most memorable story I told was a Viennese joke about a canary. Jean turned around laughing, leaned back, lost his balance and fell taking his table with him. Paint spilled over his hankies on the floor spoiling them. We stopped laughing.

The boss said, " Ho, ho, ho!"

However, there were times when we did not feel like joking. The Germans became less and less pleasant. They had begun to send young people to Germany to work on farms, in mines and in factories. Those receiving orders to present themselves to the Germans, had to have proof that they had a job in what the Germans considered a vital industry, or they were shipped off.

The Belgians had been a free people, and were not in the habit to jump just because someone told them to. At first there were youngsters who simply did not go. Needless to say, the Germans picked them up at home. Then youngsters who received deportation orders disappeared into hiding. So, the Germans arrested their families, and increased street raids to catch the evaders. Soldiers would cut off streets. Everyone in it was trapped. In Belgium, all the houses had their street doors locked. Thanks to the training I had at the AREPROR, I was able to make myself a master key for such emergencies.

Belgians whose papers were in order were released. Jews were invariably taken away. Herrmann, Lintschi's husband, the fellow who had gotten me the job at the Bar du Sud, received an order to report for work, went and was not seen again. From a letter he had somehow managed to send, we learned that he worked at a coastal fortification in France.

In the meantime, people went to work in the morning and went home in the evening, for there was nothing else to be done.

Sometimes, at work, when our mood was low, a song would help. Jean, who was Flemish, liked Flemish songs. His favored was " Dar by de molen, de moye molen..." He sighed a lot when he sang. I do believe he was a romantic.

Slowly, with the efficiency the Germans are known for, they carried out their destructive strategy against the Jews. A long time ago, our IDs, had been marked with a large red stamp: "JEW" in French and Flemish: "JUIF-JOOD".

Now a decree demanded that Jews wear a yellow star to make identification easier. Of course, we had to purchase these.

Hundreds of Belgians showed their sympathy by sewing the stars to the left front of their coats as well. The following Sunday, Ernst and I, while on a walk through the "Bois de la Camber", where repeatedly stopped by mostly female students who wanted to buy yellow stars.

The Germans showed they intended to remain master of the situation by announcing all non-Jews caught wearing the yellow star would be treated as Jews. That meant, arrest and deportation to an unknown destination. The same was promised to those who showed any sympathy or courtesy to Jews, such as offering one a seat on a crowded streetcar, even if the Jew happened to be an invalid or a pregnant woman.

The Belgians promptly took their stars off.

I wrote a letter to the Dirkx', to tell them that I would refrain from visiting them in the future, should they fear that my visits could cause them unpleasantness. I received a prompt, kind and moving reply.

"...We are looking forward to having you as our guest regularly as usual. The enemy and his designs will never be able to influence our friendship in any way..."

At the studio Laura, my coworkers, expressed their regrets over the situation, and showered me with kind words.

Now the Germans began to arrest those Jews whose stars were not well sewn on. My cousin Hertha, was one of those arrested. That is, she failed to come home one day, and it took several days to find out that she was in prison. In a way, her being in prison was a relief, because she could have been deported, and no one had ever come back from a deportation. Hertha who was twenty years old, was not allowed visitors. After three weeks she was released. There was something changed about her. She refused to talk about her imprisonment and behaved strangely. She seemed to be in a fog, very absent-minded and talked to herself. When she talked to others she often did not make any sense.

Emil, who continued to visit us often, took our misfortunes to heart. Because he looked quite Jewish, he had already been arrested several times, and we decided not to go on walks together anymore.

In July of 1942 the mass deportation of Jews began in earnest. A "Jew school" had been opened to give those who had been expelled from public schools an opportunity to continue their schooling. Also, those who enrolled in that school were to be left unmolested. The courses were to take place in the evening, and after some soul searching I too enrolled. Then I had second thoughts about it and never went.

Most of the Jews hid their star, carrying newspapers, packages or briefcases for this purpose. I thought this was silly, especially because it was so obvious. Since I was a Jew, a fact which had made me so different from those who had made me so aware of it, I felt that my star was a distinction not a shame.

A German soldier stopped my stepfather in the street. It was not to arrest him, but to warn him that those Jews arrested were sent to concentration camps in Poland to be exterminated! His advice was to take the star off. But, we refused to believe the good man's warning, it would have driven us to utter despair. Still, we became more and more cautious, avoiding unnecessary risk we did not go out unless we had to.

Studio Laura was downtown where most of the raids took place. Therese, one of my co-workers, gave me an address where I should be able to get free-lance work. Others had led me to believe that there was plenty of free-lance work available. So, I resigned from studio Laura.

I also checked with the Jewish committee. This was done in a round-about way, asking someone who knew someone, because going there had become out of the question. (Germans loved to stop people going in or out of that place.) My inquiry about work led me to the well known Jewish Belgian photographer Polak who had been King Albert's personal photographer and who also had made a famous photograph of Queen Astrid.

Mr. Polak hired me on the spot. I felt quite good about this, especially I believe, because the photographer's studio was on the Chaussee de Haecht, only a few blocks from where we lived.

The studio was a friendly and cozy place in an old solid building which did not allow street noises to penetrate. The darkroom was in the basement, the workplace was over it behind the studio. My job was to develop and retouch negatives, and color enlargements. The work was pleasant enough, if hard on my eyes.

After working there for a while, I had to get eye glasses.

One other person working with Mr. Polak when he hired me was a Viennese by the name of Gottlieb. He trimmed, mounted and matted photographs. Mr. Gottlieb was a small man with a small face inhabited by a huge nose, but decorated by a very friendly smile. Behind thick glasses glimmered lively black eyes, and the thin hair on his round head seemed as fine as silk. There was something about this man, I don't know what, that said he had suffered a great deal.

While the silence in the studio was only interrupted by the squeaking of the gluing press, I scraped away skin imperfections on photographs and dabbed paint over scratches and dust spots. The coloring was done with pastels, which like bronze dust was inclined to get on everything.

Underneath us we could hear the steps of our employer, muffled though they were by the heavy floor. When someone entered the store, a bell rang, and when Mr. Polak was busy downstairs, Mr. Gottlieb would serve the customers. Apparently there were more customers than the studio ever had.

The reason for all this business, I believe, was the sign in the store's display window which, according to a German decree, advised people that this business was a Jewish enterprise.

Mr. Gottlieb took a picture of Herbert, Ernst and myself, framed by the dirty buildings of the rue de Moulin.

The city of Malines, some twenty miles from Brussels, having all kinds of fame attached to its name by its long and turbulent history, now became infamous for housing a new camp, the barracks of "Dossin", where Jews were assembled to be deported.

Before long, the Germans dissolved the Jew school as a bad idea, and its teachers and staff received the dreaded order to report *for work* - with food for two days - to the barracks of Dossin. From there, freight trains loaded with about three thousand Jews each, left at regular intervals for concentration camps in Poland. This was as depressing as it was scary.

Mornings I decorated hankies, at the very attractive rate of three francs each, for a place Therese had recommended to me,. From noon until seven thirty in the evening I worked at Polak's.

Conversations with the not talkative Mr. Gottlieb were usually about current events, our hopes to see the war end soon, and our fears not to see the end. Only once did he talk of a personal experience. It was when Polak, who seemed even more pessimistic than Gottlieb, told us that he did not believe that the British could be expected to return to the continent until 1944. I thought Polak was crazy, and suggested that by that time we would all be dead. "Don't you think so?" I asked Gottlieb?

"Well," he said, "it would be very bad". And then he suddenly told us something about what happened to him in Vienna, as if he felt the need to substantiate his pessimism. "I remember when they arrested me. God knows, I still wonder how I escaped with my life." He stopped working, shook his head, and smiled nervously. "They have special ways, you know. For example, they kept us standing against a wall in the prison yard for an entire day. We faced the wall, and when a man moved, he would get hit from behind so that his face smashed against the wall."

I sat next to the only window in the workshop and stared into the narrow courtyard outside where nimble sun specks danced over gray stucco walls. After a few moments of silence, Gottlieb continued: "One day something extraordinary happened. They had us up against the wall again. A S. A. man stalked for and back behind us, cursing us and promising to teach us a lesson. He would show us he knew what to do with the cowardly bird-shit stinking bastards we were. I would like to see the one of you who would have the guts to fight me. God damn it, Christ, that Jewboy I like to see!" I think we all felt the urge to slug it out with him. I thought, 'My God, how nice this could be'.

We had not eaten in several days. There was not much life in any of us left. Most of us could hardly stand up, much less fight.

" The S.A. spit and laughed with contempt. But not for long.
A young man stepped from the ranks. My God, who was he? Was he a boxer? Well, anyway, he beat the S. A. man to a pulp. A few S.S. men who had watched, rewarded the winner in their own way. They beat and trampled him until he laid dead in his blood."

Gottlieb turned to his work. So did I. Polak, chewing on a tooth pick, went back downstairs to the lab without saying a word.

Herbert and Trude received the dreaded orders to report to the barracks of Dossin. We felt terrible. Still, we tried to console them and ourselves by making believe they were really only to go to work. Was that not what the orders said? There was a list of the items they were to take along and they packed quickly.

In a few minutes we were to say good-bye. With other relatives, I stood helpless, sad and silent in their living room, which also served as dining room and bed room, and watched Herbert and Trude eating a warm meal before leaving. A boiled potato and boiled peas.

They had received some canned spinach and peas as gifts. I could not believe it, but to my shame, I envied them for it. This, and the impossibility to be of help, and the looks on my cousins faces tortured me for a long time to come.

When I embraced them I tried to sound confident and optimistic. Then I left, slowly and with difficulty.

Not long before that dreadful day, Herbert had written in my souvenir book: "Remember often the beautiful days we spent together in Brussels."

Yes, I shall remember the long walks in Laeken and the Bois de la Cambre, the worries and dreams we shared. Our search for flowers in the wood of Tervueren; our visit to the museum; the strange habit we had of starting to say the same thing at the same time; the strange song we used to like because it was so hilarious. "Senjorita Nepolah".

Most of all, I remember Herbert's quiet courage. He had much of what is good and innocent in humans.

I didn't know Trude very well. She was two or three years older than I, preoccupied with her own circle of friends. Met her only at family get-togethers. Trude was very vivacious, and a rather good looking blond with laughing blue eyes and a deep warm voice.

Now that Jews were no longer permitted to be legitimately employed they swelled the ranks of the poor. A Jewish soup kitchen was opened in the rue Ruysbrook. Their soups were better than those at the city welfare kitchens. I began going there despite the greater danger of being picked up by the Germans, because of a long streetcar ride. Of course, there was also the possibility that the kitchen itself would be raided.

In the meantime, I still wore the yellow star. Total strangers greeted me in the streets. Once a distinguished looking gentleman removed his hat and bowed with great dignity.

One evening an elderly lady saved my life. I had been walking unsuspectingly through a small street when she stopped me and whispered: "Young man, for the love of God, don't go any further. The Germans are hiding behind the next corner and are arresting Jews that come by."

The Germans were in fact constantly increasing their measures against Jews. The time when they only took those whose star was not "well sewn on" was gone. Now they took one and all. Jews began to take the stars off.

On one of the last days I wore mine, I had to go downtown for some reason I no longer recall. I went early in the morning when raids were least likely. There were not many people in the streets. A German Air Force officer came walking towards me. I almost turned into a side street to avoid him, but changed my mind when I realized he was an older man, and alone. He was tall, white-haired and had piercing eyes. When we were close to each other, he stopped, clicked his heals, and looking me in the eyes gave me a snappy military salute. I was too surprised to say anything. I just nodded and walked on.

Shortly thereafter, I walked on the rue Royal, still with my star. A black limousine came slowly towards me. Gestapo license plate: "POL". I held my breath, but miraculously the car turned into the side street ahead of me. That was a close call. I turned to walk in the opposite direction and faced an obviously angry young woman. "You take this star off!" she hissed.

I shrank from her ire, ready to walk on, but she barred my way, eyes blazing: "You crazy young man! Take the star off!"

I had the impression that the woman would tear it off for me if I didn't. Reluctantly, I felt for the star and tore it off. She walked away satisfied. Chances are that this woman saved my life. The second woman to do so within a few days. Only moments after the star was removed, the black sedan reappeared from the side street and drove slowly by me.

Here an acquaintance failed to come home, there another family was deported. Our nerves were constantly on edge, and mother suffered most.

Now we too received orders to report to Malines. (“Work order #0987) The whole family. It was not entirely unexpected and I was ready to go. My life at home had not been exactly pleasant. I was naive enough to believe it wouldn't be worse elsewhere.

I invited Ernst to enjoy my last day of freedom with me. (21. August 1942.) Provided with cigarettes we went to the finest Cinema in town, the Eldorado. Grinning we went by the poster which served notice to Jews to stay out. The movie was about the life of Rembrandt, a German propaganda which had the artist destroyed by Jews. But, all in all it was a good show, and I even managed to forget the deportation order for a while.

Afterwards we strolled through the familiar streets downtown, ate cake in the finest café. Eight o'clock had long come and gone, and I would have enjoyed myself better had not Ernst reminded me with obnoxious persistence, it was time to go home.

Arrived there, I found mother terribly shaken. My stepfather swore to kill the first German he would encounter.

As was the custom, a few acquaintances came to express their sympathy. They stood around staring at us soberly, probably wondering when their turn would come, just as we had done on previous occasions.

I went to bed immediately, thinking that this might well be the last night I would sleep in a bed and I was going to make the best of it.

The next morning, my mother was going to throw herself from the window, unless I promised that I and Margit would not go. What could the Nazis do if all of us did not show up that they couldn't do if all of us surrendered?

It was the "Association of Jews of Belgium", 18 Quai du Commerce, which did the dirty work of selecting their own kind for the Germans. Those who did the selecting had the German's solemn promise that they and their families would be spared from "relocation".(In the end they all were sent too, of course.)

Under very unusual circumstances, the association had been known to rescind a deportation order. My stepfather went there that morning to have the order revoked and get protection papers, or *kill them all*. He was serious too and, having been a wrestling champion in his youth, quite capable. Once he had carried an angry, fat official down three flights of stairs and had unceremoniously sat him on the sidewalk.

In the meantime, mother sent me to St. Peters hospital to find myself a patriotic doctor who would schedule me for an operation or something. I went to satisfy her, but the doctor did not find anything wrong with me, and I was not clever enough to convince him otherwise.

To my surprise, my stepfather was successful. Margit, who had gone with him told me that it had not been easy to convince the people at the association that we were not to be deported. But, everyone had been duly impressed after her papa hammered a desk and spilled ink bottles over a mass of papers on it, and so on in that line. Anyway, the important thing was that we did not have to go. Even mother calmed down and soon things were as they had been before this interruption. Mornings I decorated hankies, afternoons I worked at Polak's.

One day, Mr. Gottlieb did not come to work. After work, Mr. Polak went to his residence to check on him. Gottlieb's wife had been arrested, and he surrendered to the Germans in the hope to be near her and to share her fate. Mr. Polak was quite upset about Gottlieb's arrest, as was I, but he never talked about it.

In the meantime, the photographer's business was still good. Ernst was hired to help with the retouching and coloring of photos. Denise was hired to replace Mr. Gottlieb. She was eighteen, quite obese and otherwise not attractive, but she was quiet, and a very good worker.

Somehow, it had been arranged to have Margit go to a girl's camp for a vacation.

The hunt for Jews, black-marketeers, undesirable elements, and also those Belgians who refused to be deported to Germany as slave labor, went on a twenty-four hour schedule. Raids were carried out by military police, S.S. troops, and of course the Gestapo.

Unmarked Gestapo squad cars hunted primarily for Jews.

Soon the name Jacques became infamous and cursed. He patrolled the streets with the Gestapo, in one of their black limousines, and pointed out those in the crowd he thought were Jewish. Those so designated had to proof they were not or come along. It was Jacques who had pointed out Emil Rausch a couple of times. Jacques, who was Jewish himself, received 300 francs for every Jew he turned in. Anybody who cared to, could get 300 francs for turning in a Jew. At that time, 300 francs would buy one loaf of bread.(Jacques worked for the Gestapo until the very day of the liberation of Brussels. A lot of people were looking for him after that, but he was not found.)

On September 18, 1942, mother celebrated her fourty-sixth birthday. Alas, she looked more like seventy. Her hair was white. In her sunken face shone her restless black eyes. Her nerves seemed to have reached the end of their strength. She shuddered when a car passed the house. When I would be a few minutes late coming home from work, she was waiting at the window.

It was uncle Simon who came up with the idea to send mother to a mental hospital. She would get care, rest and better food. It would not be bad. Simon had been there himself at one time, and best of all the Germans did not bother with mental hospital inmates yet.

We considered the idea for a while, and decided that if this was the way to save her, then why not?

However, we had great pains convincing mother. She cried and claimed that we just wanted to get rid of her. The war would be over soon anyway. Well, perhaps, still why take unnecessary chances?

Finally, we got poor mother to go to a clinic for an examination. My stepfather exaggerated her suicide threats as well as her nervousness. Her nervousness was kind of obvious. Also, the doctor was no fool, and realizing our situation admitted her to the hospital for observation.

We were glad, thinking that mother would be safe and also would get some rest and recuperate a little.

That we were not allowed to visit her for two weeks was too bad, but we were not too upset, knowing that mother was not really ill. Quietly we counted the days till visiting time. And we congratulated ourselves for having mother safely stashed away.

For now the time had come when everyone tried to save their skin. Rarely was a friendship strong enough to provide food and shelter for a hunted one. Friends of Jews were treated like Jews. That is, arrest and concentration camp.

Emil Rausch continued to visit us. He was constantly planning to save me. But, he lived at home and depended on his parents, and his plans could not develop into action. Still, compulsively we continued to plan.

At Dirkx' I avoided talking about the persecution because Mrs. Dirkx was easily upset. Besides, I did not want them to think I expected special sacrifices in addition to what they were doing.

A girl was much easier to save than a boy. The easiest to save was a baby, especially uncircumcised ones. There was, of course, the matter of identification documents, but somehow with a newborn this obstacle could be much more readily overcome than with older individuals. One certainly did not have to worry about the infant breaking down under questioning to reveal its true identity. Even the Catholic Church was interested in small children, providing they were truly given up, and no efforts would be made by surviving relatives to reclaim them later.

There were not many babies born to Jews at the time. And, while it was much more difficult to find shelter for older children, an appealing proposal came up concerning my two year old cousin

Rita. I don't recall who and how this scheme originated, but a childless couple had been found willing to adopt her. They were simple, but honest and good people who lived in the suburb of Woluwe St. Lambert. He was a ticket puncher for the streetcar system. Their apartment was small, but spotlessly clean, and in all other respects these people seemed to be heaven sent. And, they were excited about Rita.

Prevailing circumstances did not allow for much getting acquainted time. The adopting people needed a cover story. Shabby looking, not French speaking parents of the child could of course be noticed by neighbors. (Neither Rose nor Simon spoke a passable French.) Hence, I took Rose and Rita to the terminal of streetcar 27 at a pre-arranged time where we were met by a lady of the Red Cross. Aunt Rose would not let Rita go until she had seen the people who were to take care of the child, and a last minute concession was made to let us come along to their home.

We spent a few minutes there. Aunt Rose was satisfied and we slipped out after Rose told Rita she would be back soon.

When my stepfather and I returned to the place after dark on the same day to deliver Rita's belongings, we found the adopting parents close to despair. Rita had screamed all day long for her mama and had refused food. Now Rita was asleep in the arms of the woman's mother who had been walking the floor with her. We tried to convince these people that the child had to get used to its new surrounding, and while we talked Rita woke. Immediately she began to scream for mama. Our presence did not seem to help. We had an awful time calming the child. Finally, put to bed she went to sleep from sheer exhaustion. No sooner had she gone to sleep when the man came home from work. The dog barked, Rita woke and screamed again until she passed out. The man accompanied us back to the streetcar. On the way he told us how happy he was to have the child at his home and he assured us that he and his wife would always show her but love. Alas, the very next evening Rita returned home to mama. After she had spent another day screaming, the distraught people had contacted the Red Cross. All concerned were sad about the outcome of this attempt to save Rita, except Rita who was happy to be with her mama again. Well, the child had never spent a day without her mama.

Fall had brought some cold days, but the sun made an unusual effort as if driven by pity for those people who had difficulties getting the fuel needed to keep warm.

The day had come to visit mother. The clinic (Sans Souci) was outside the city, removed from its noise, beautifully located among meadows and trees. As we approached the building, we heard what seemed to be fowl, but when we came closer, we realized, the cackling we heard was produced by inmates. Other animals were imitated as well. There were also some patients who sang or talked to themselves. One seemingly was conducting mass. The strange hash of voices might shock the unexpectant visitor, but obviously was taken for granted by the inmates and the people who cared for them. What was particularly strange, was that every so often all noise would cease as if on a command only heard by the inmates. A short period of silence followed before the concert resumed. Somewhat intimidated we followed a nurse who unlocked doors for us and showed us the way.

Mother was in the "quiet ward", but the racket raised in other parts of the building could be clearly heard there. All the patients in this ward were in their bed. The first thing mother said was that she would not stay, and then she began to cry. Apparently she had cried before we came, because her eyes were quite red. Finally, she calmed herself and embraced us. She was happy to see us and spent the visiting time inquiring tearfully about Margit, and reminding me to be careful.

When we returned to visit her, the same thing happened. At first, she wanted to get out, but then, after we told her about the latest raids, she calmed down.

There may have been ten patients in mother's ward. Most sat in their bed and stared. One women kept winking at me and kept calling me to her bedside. When I finally went to her, she told me about her daughters, wanted to give me their address, insisting that I should visit them. A nurse, who kept an eye on all, finally freed me from the woman. As I turned away, there was another woman standing behind me. She was tall and skeletal, her skin and her hair were snow white, and in the white nightgown she wore she looked like a living ghost. The bones of her face, dominated by a huge nose, shone through translucent skin. But the most terrifying thing about her were her burning eyes. I held my breath expecting to be assaulted, but nothing happened. Immobile we stared at each other. She stood frozen like a cat stalking a bird and thinking the bird has seen her. Finally, I stepped to one side, and since the woman did not move, I walked away. In the bed next to mother's sat a young woman with a yellowish face in which black eyes cried quietly. According to mother, this woman cried most of the time and stared at the walls. I was one of the last to leave the room when visiting time was over. My head buzzed from all the confusion and the noise. A soft voice called me from one of the beds at my left. "You. There you are." I turned and looked at a rather young woman. Something weird about her I could not identify stirred pity in me. "You!" she repeated, this time a little louder. Suddenly, she seemed to have a cramp in her face, and from her distorted features came a terrible blood-curling scream.

All kinds of rumors circulated about the fate of those deported, but no one knew for sure what was happening to them. Occasionally, a postcard arrived from one to his family. A few words to the effect that the sender of the card was doing well. Such rare greetings seemed to originate in western Europe a few days after the sender's arrest, and I don't know of anyone who received a second message. So, while some people experienced a temporary elation because they heard from a loved one, there was no real reason to dissipate our fears.

Now the Gestapo drove around in the middle of the night to pick up Jews. They had more than just Jacques to help them and no one slept well any longer. It seemed that more and more people were willing to betray Jews for 300 francs per head. That they could eat bread they bought with that money was beyond my comprehension. Of course, every precinct had a listing of all its inhabitants. The Germans could well have access to those.

Each time a car came through the street and each time someone came up the stairs, we listened fearfully.

Mother had been in the clinic six weeks. Snow had fallen. We rarely had heat. Mostly we froze. Sometimes I worked dressed in my overcoat and my gloves on. Soon the New Year would be here. One dared hardly think or talk about what it would bring. When people met, they usually had some good news to talk about, but no one believed it anymore.

Still, it was instinctive to hope, to dream and to try to convince oneself that things would be different again soon.

Our minds had become adept at wishful thinking. Each bit of news, no matter how bad, was immediately converted to good news. When the Germans conquered more territory, we would say they had walked into an Allied trap. When the Germans reported new victories, we would read into these signs of despair.

At least Polak's studio was nice and warm. He could afford to buy coal on the black market. We did not feel safer in his place than anywhere else, even though his daughter worked for the Jewish Committee. These people had been spared so far, but how much longer?

The eight PM curfew included Belgian non-Jews now also. Only those who worked late or at night were exempt. German patrols could be expected anywhere.

Polak's studio had a recessed entrance. One evening when I opened the door to go home, there were two S.S., two of Hitler's bravest, hiding in the recess, laying in wait for some violator of the curfew to come by.

At the moment I opened the door, a woman came by. The S.S. turned their flashlights on and stepped into the street. While they busied themselves with the woman, I slipped silently into the darkness, truly appreciative of the rubber soles on my shoes. Had she not come by, I would have walked into their hands.

From that evening on, I went into the store before leaving to check on the recess through the display window before I ventured out.

As you can imagine I favored moonless nights, especially when it rained and one could not see ones hand in front of one's face. And, because the Nazis had the habit of hiding in doorways as well as behind corners, I walked quietly in the middle of the street feeling very clever. Yet, I had found out that most of all one had to have luck, and, or the protection of the *Allmighty*. I tried to tell myself I had both.

Mother insisted on coming home. Nothing could persuade her not to.

And there she was, worrying and trembling as before, but insisting that she was happier than she had been in the hospital where she had spent all of her time fretting about us.

"Poldi" Goldfeld was our next door neighbor. She occupied the other of the two apartments on the third floor of 125 rue de Moulin. Also a refugee from Vienna, she unlike her husband was not Jewish. Her husband, "Schafy" had been taken to the military compound in Eterbeek on May 10, 1940, and like Leo, whose friend he was, he had been deported to France. Their son Walter had shared his father's fate, but escaped and made his way back to Brussels. Walter was about my age. The Goldfelds and the Kaplans had known each other in Vienna. I met Walter in Brussels at the AREPROR, the tech school for Jewish immigrants I mentioned earlier.

Walter did not look Jewish. He knew how to talk German with the genuine brashness of the genuine German, and he looked happy. Not your common Jewish look. Walter was also "sharp" and had gotten himself a job working as a mechanic for the Germans at the airport of Evère (Brussels). His job, vital to German war efforts, exempted him from deportation. Another advantage he had was that those who worked for the Germans received larger food rations.

Poldi and mother knew each other from Vienna, and now they became rather close friends. Poldi worked at home in an industry I have not spoken of yet. She made cigarettes which were sold on the ever flourishing black market. Mother helped Poldi on occasions when there was too much work for Poldi. This was good for mother, because Poldi was a great talker and when the two women were together, they could keep their minds off realities.

My stepfather continued to transport coal and to move people with a cart he rented. He had build a reputation, was very busy and seldom at home. I had to help him occasionally, but because I earned more as a decorator than I could helping him, he required my assistance less and less.

Our three room apartment consisted of a kitchen and two bedrooms. The kitchen also served as living room and dining room. Off the kitchen there was a small utility room where we washed. One of the bedrooms was Margit's. Because the other bedroom was crowded with beds and a dresser, I worked in Margit's room at a large table at her window. When my stepfather was home, I ate at my work table, having been banned from the kitchen table because I refused to eat with a hat on my head. (Like my mother, my stepfather came from an orthodox home, where ritual was often confused with religion.)

It was a beautiful winter morning. Both, my stepfather and Margit were out. Mother was washing dishes. I was working, glad about the sunshine and the blue sky. At Poldi's, our neighbor, all was quiet, which was not unusual because she was in the habit of sleeping late - until about noon.

Suddenly, it seemed to me, I heard unfriendly harsh voices from Poldi's apartment. Furniture was being moved and a chair thrown over. For a few moments I continued to work, presuming that Poldi had another argument with her son Walter, who on occasions was very rude to her. But then I remembered that Walter had left for work at seven, and alarmed, I stopped work and listened.

Through the wall voices were muffled, but some man demanded in German that something be opened and something be shown. And, where those boots I heard? I could not hear Poldi, and it was not her nature to be pushed around quietly.

I got up and looked out the window. Sure enough, in front of the house stood a shiny black sedan with a "POL" license plate. And there they were in the house, the Gestapo right next door. It was quite possible that they would come to us also to make sure that “everything was in order”.

The sedan seemed to be empty and there was no one near it. What to do? Was it better to leave or to stay? Maybe one man was downstairs in the hallway or in the staircase.

I went in the kitchen where mother was still washing dishes, and quietly told her that the Gestapo was at Poldi's. Mother did not break up as I feared. "Don't talk nonsense," she said and dried her hands. I asked her to listen. One man's unpleasant voice was shouting again.

"Take your shoes off and go quietly downstairs." I said, "They yell so much they won't hear you. I will lock up and follow you. Go to Lintschi." I added as she already softly opened the door while I put a worker's jacket on.

Through the open door, I heard the wooden stairs groan. Mother was probably between the second and the first floor. I stood in the hallway. All had grown quiet at Poldi's. Damn it! One of the Nazis might well check on the noise in the staircase. I took myself under control and turned the key in the lock. Then as nonchalantly as possible, I descended the groaning stairs. There was no use to sneak downstairs. There was no use hurrying. It would only arouse suspicion.

Finally, I reached the street. Once outside, I felt relieved. Mother was half a block ahead of me. I went slowly without turning around straight to Polak's who was surprised to see me so early. I told him what happened and then worked till eight that night.

Later, as we sat around the kitchen table with Poldi, she told us that she did not know what the Gestapo had looked for, and we wondered if they had not come for us but had gone to the wrong apartment.

Poldi also told us that when I left, one of the Nazis had gone to the door, had already his hand on the doorknob, then changed his mind. Upon leaving the house, they arrested " Hans", a friend of Walter's who was just coming upstairs. Why Hans entered the house considering that the POL car was parked in front of it was a mystery.

Strangely enough, this just related incident calmed my mother considerably, because she imagined the Gestapo would not return. Why should they want to check the same place twice?

Decorated hankies were supposed to be the hot item this coming Spring. I was glad to have plenty of work, because we were able to eat better. Lettuce, potatoes and bread almost every day, and there was now enough money for meat and dumplings on the Sabbath. Also my clothing was quite worn out and needed to be refurbished. I was saving all I could from the 10% I was allowed to keep, for some clothing.

Hand-painted scarves and lampshades were supposed to become popular items and I made samples. I now worked from nine in the morning till one on hankies and samples. From two to eight I worked at Polak's, then went home, ate and worked till two in the morning. As I did so in Margit's room, it was fortunate that she was a great sleeper. Nothing could keep her awake when she wanted to snooze.

1943 began rather quietly. For Christmas and New Year, the Germans left the Jews alone. Maybe the Nazis had taken a few days off. Then, shortly after New Year, the hunt resumed. There was a new angle to it now, as the Germans supported their activities with an anti-Jewish, and anti-Bolshevik propaganda campaign. Large vicious, colorful posters, appeared everywhere. They seemed to have little effect on the population in general.

Long lines of bundled-up people waiting for stores to open, not just for food but for all kinds of goods, had become a familiar aspect of life. We froze and counted the days to the coming of Spring which was to bring not only warmer weather, but also an English-American second front in the West.

There was new hope, because in Russia and in Africa the fortunes of war were now favoring the Allies.

We kept trembling with fear of the Gestapo and became used to new slogans and words the Germans introduced. "White Army" was an multi-national army of volunteers fighting the Russians on the side of the Germans. "Westwall" was the "invincible" defenses the Germans had built, along the ocean shores in the west, with the help of slaves rounded up for that purpose. (It seems that when their work was done, or when they became weak or ill, they were murdered.)

Subversive activities against German installations multiplied as did arrests of hostages and their executions. Prisons were overcrowded.

There were rumors of new concentration camps. "Breendonck" was one in Belgium. People listened to the British Broadcasting, even though this was now a crime punishable by death.

We believed that the Allies would come to the rescue in two to three month, and when the time had elapsed, the prophecy was simply repeated.

First they were to come in the Spring, then in the Summer, then in the Fall.

When I arrived at Polak's studio to begin my afternoon's work, a man was waiting in the store. Polak entered from the studio as I entered from the street. When I walked behind the men to the studio, I heard Polak ask the customer what he could do for him, and the men said "Gestapo". I turned and saw that the Nazi held an ID under Polak's nose.

Ernst sat quietly in the workshop retouching a photo when I stormed in with the news. Startled he jumped to his feet dropping his tools. Just then a door slammed somewhere in the front of the house, and we dashed downstairs into the lab bolting the trap door behind us. Momentarily we felt safe. No one could get to us - not without a lot of troubles. In the dark of the lab, illuminated by one red light bulb, we regained our composure. After all, I had seen only one man. It would be unlikely that he would search the building all by himself.

Before long we were telling each other to be ashamed for being scared of one lonely "Kraut". Then pretty soon we ascended the stairs angry and resolved to convert the Nazi into hash should he have the nerve to come to the workshop. We would be warned of his coming by a bell that rang in the workshop whenever someone entered the studio from the store.

While we thought about how to deal with the Kraut, the bell sounded its discreet tingle. Ernst grabbed a long iron bar and hid behind a table. I picked a liter bottle of acid from the lab supply shelf and jumped behind the door. Already there were steps approaching the workshop. The door opened slowly. I lifted the bottle to smash it on the intruder's head with all the strength at my command, and at that moment I recognized Polak's coat.

Shaken by the close call he had, Polak, going through his hair with his hands as if the threat to his skull was still there, told us that the German had only checked his papers.

We were somewhat embarrassed, but also quite relieved, and more than satisfied with our courage. We spent the rest of the afternoon talking and laughing about the incident, and Polak's scare when we almost clobbered him.

Denise was no longer working at Polak's. She and her sister had moved to the country to live with some friends of their family.

I finally had saved enough money to have a suit and overcoat made. (Ready made clothing was only available with special permits.) Because no one at home was pleased, I could not enjoy my purchase either. The reproaches I received, though I felt they were undeserved, made me feel guilty.

Margit had come home from her stay at a camp. I should have mentioned this earlier.

Anyway, her birthday was coming (March 19.) and Polak took a picture of her and also of me in my new gray suit.

Denise was replaced by Lilly, a Jewish girl who was not only very beautiful, but also very vain, flirty and lazy. Ernst fell for her head over heels. She had him wrapped around her little finger faster than it takes to say so. When Polak was not in the workshop, and he rarely was, Lilly became helpless and Ernest jumped around doing her work. When I reproached him for his behavior, he told me he could not help it. Lilly had tried me a few times, but I had given her the cold shoulder and she had given up.

She loved to sit, her hands folded in her lap and jabber. To assist Ernst in courting her, I went to the store when a customer entered which was her job. Returned, I would ask him if he kissed her yet, and he would shake his head sadly. After a while, I told Ernst I would help him by giving him an ultimatum. If in two weeks she was still not kissed by him, I would take her away from him and show him "how it was done." Like Ernst, I hardly had any experience in this matter, but because I did not care for the girl, I was not even a bit nervous about the proposition made.

Ernst did his best, but could not charm Lilly. She only laughed at him.

In the evening, before leaving for home, she combed her hair in the reception room for at least fifteen minutes. Ernest went to check on her every few minutes to make sure that she was all right. I was ashamed of him and told him so to no avail. After the two weeks were up, I gave the desperate Ernst another two. He kept asking my advice, and I could not give him much, especially since he refused to listen. One evening, after she had left, I was giving Ernest another pointer.

"Psst," he whispered, " I think she is still in front of the dressing room mirror. "That's improbable," I protested, "she must have gone long ago."

Quietly we listened. My cousin was right, someone was there. I got up and looked through the open door. It was rather dark and I strained my eyes to see. It was Polak's son who stood in front of the mirror. To my amazement, I noticed that he was completely bald. In his hands he held a wig which he combed with great zeal. It was a delightful scene, especially since we had no idea of the true state of Alex's wavy red hair, and he had no idea that he was being watched.

Later we learned from Mr. Polak that Alex lost his hair the night he caught a burglar in the house.

I suppose that you never heard of Alex Polak. But you may have seen or even used his invention, the photo machine, the contraption one can find at some bus terminals and in department stores. Drop in some money and it takes your picture.

Another two weeks went by and Ernest had gotten nowhere with Lilly. Yet he continued to do much of her work. I was willing to give him yet another two weeks, but he gave up. "Okay" he said, "you show me."

"Alright, I will show you," I said, having no idea how.

Now that the Gestapo picked up Jews at home as well as in the streets, there was really no place safer than any other. Maybe one was safer in the street where one could move, while there was no escape from an enclosure, be it a building or a streetcar. So, Emil and I went on walks again. We favored large parks where we could see large areas and where there was room to move.

On a Sunday, when Emil and I were walking, we encountered a young man by the name of Stern whom I met when I enrolled in the "Jew school". After the usual small talk, our conversation turned to local events and the war.

Stern was amazed when I admitted that I did not have a false ID. He could not understand, I dared walk around, taking a chance on being stopped by Jacques. And he told us how he had been stopped and let go after flashing his false papers. Surely I would be interested in a "genuine" false ID, and it so happened that he, Stern, might be able to get one for me.

We made a date to meet at the Bois de la Cambre in a week.

Emil and I were excited about the prospect of getting me a false ID, because if it was a "genuine" one, chances for survival were vastly improved. Genuine meant that the person whose identity was assumed actually existed.

Stern was one hour late, and then did not have interesting news for me. He needed more time and we made another appointment, and then yet another. Finally, he was able to show me a card just like the one I would get for a mere 3000 francs. Of course, I did not have that kind of money.

Well, skeptics that we were, we had not expected much and therefor were not very disappointed.

Shortly after our last meeting, Stern came to see me at Polak's and offered me an ID for 1800 francs, claiming that luckily for me, the prices had just come down. The ID card was empty and I was to fill it out myself. That was not my idea of "genuine", besides, I did not have that kind of money either. I explained all this to Stern and never saw him again.

At work, I seemed to have a great deal more luck with Lilly than cousin Ernst. I asked her for a date, and she actually showed up. In her finery and makeup she looked like from Hollywood, like some sort of dream. I suddenly felt very shy and tried in vain to get a conversation going. The date lasted five minutes. She announced that she was bored and before I could reply, she jumped on a passing streetcar and was gone.

Lilly had made a fool of me after all.

The next day at work I kept quietly to myself. For once, Lilly actually worked. Ernst and I were amazed to no end. I ignored not only her effort, but also her presence. She tried several times to start a conversation by asking me about something concerning her work, but I did not even look at her. The funniest thing about this scene was poor Ernst, who had no idea what was going on and did not know what to make of it. Most of the afternoon went by in this way, and then suddenly Lilly lost her temper.

"You have no manners," she squeaked, "can't you answer when one talks to you?" I turned slowly to face her and with a stern and cold voice said, "How dare you, you uneducated brat, talk to me in the intimate manner you have indulged in all afternoon?"

Lilly stared at me in wide-eyed disbelief.

"Where do we know each other from?" I went on thoroughly enjoying myself, "Where did you get your incredible nerve? I never knew anyone as incipient as you. Don't stare so stupidly and get back to work. If you show me any more disrespect I will spank you!"

I turned back to my work with as much dignity as I could muster, trying hard not to break out in a hysterical laugh. She came beside me, pale but proud: "Did you say you are going to spank me? That we would have to see." I began to work: "If you don't get busy you will get the beating of your life!"

There was a heart-breaking sob. Ernst and I turned in utter surprise. Lilly was crying! Before I knew what was happening, she had thrown herself around my neck: "Please, don't be angry with me. I love you so!"

I was speechless. Ernst looked as if he had swallowed a fly.

Lilly underwent quite a change. Her manners improved much. She stopped jabbering and worked all day without asking Ernst for help. Even her voice changed.

Needless to say, we were impressed, especially I. It was the first time, a girl had told me that she loved me. I loved to kiss her, for when my lips touched hers I forgot everything. In the evening, when she left for home, I took her to the front door and it took us forever to get there.

I did my best not to show any affection for Lilly in front of Ernst to spare his feelings.

One day, while tenderly embracing in the dark studio, we were caught by Polak. He did not say anything, but a few days later he announced that he had fired Lilly because she was so lazy. I was devastated, but there was little I could do. I did not know where she lived or how to get in touch with her. I had to wait to hear from her. In a few days I received a most affectionate letter and hurried to the address she had given. I came too late.

The Gestapo had been there before I arrived, and Lilly was not heard of again.

Sitting up in my bed, I reached for my glasses and stared into the dark. Squeaky brakes on a car had awoken me. I was covered with sweat. Any little disturbance made me nervous these days. Perhaps I was on my way to become as crazy as most of my co-religionists were. I felt for matches and lit the candle which stuck on the chair next to my bed. Noticing that my hand trembled, I smiled bitterly and searched my trouser pockets for the cigarettes Poldi had secretly handed me earlier. I lit one, put out the candle, and sucked in the smoke. Candles were expensive, of course. The tip of the cigarette glowed dimly in the darkness. Once awake, going back to sleep was difficult.

It seemed not to matter because sleep seldom brought rest. Nightmares prevented my nerves from recovering from the strains of the day.

This new nervousness made me unhappy. Angrily, I threw my glasses at the chair. I had them only a short time and had gotten into the habit of reaching for them as soon as I woke. What good did they do in the dark? And why did I have to get frightened when a car stopped outside? Brakes on a Gestapo car did not squeak. Yet, any car at night was a German car. So what? To hell with them. To sweat about it was no good. It was time I thought of something better to do. Why did I not take measures to defend or to hide myself?

But, how could I safe myself and leave my mother behind? Still, did she not have a husband? And Margit, did she not have a father? The war invalid who walked with a cane and stuttered. In German yet. What the hell could he do. Still something had to be done. I was tired of waiting for German boots to come running up the stairs.

My cigarette was consumed. Planes hummed through the night. English? American? German? Would it make any difference if I knew? I wondered what time it was but did not bother to reach for the watch I had recently bought that ticked with mechanical indifference on the chair next to me.

I rarely went downtown now. There were too many Germans there to suit me. This time, however I had a friendly encounter. I met Anne and Jacqueline, former classmates from the Royal Academy. Anne was looking for work. So I suggested that I would ask Polak if he would care to employ another artist. After all, we still were very busy.

Polak had replaced Lilly with a small, pale and hard to look at girl. He had smiled sarcastically when he introduced her to me which had done little to improve the way I felt about him. Since Lilly's dismissal and her subsequent arrest, I had hardly talked to him. Now Polak was almost eager to hire Anne on my recommendation and before he even met her, 'providing she would be a reliable person'. Anne had given me her address and I sent her a note asking her to come to the studio for an interview.

The doorbell rang five times. That was for us. Mother asked me to see who it was. A harmless enough looking woman stood by the door and I hurried downstairs. It was Therese from the "Laura" studio. We exchanged the small talk usual to encounters of friends who have not met for some time. Then I invited her upstairs to our modest place, wondering what could have brought Therese all the way across town to see me.

After introducing Therese to mother, my stepfather and Margit were not home, Therese told me that Lilly, the Italian girl who worked at "Laura", was to leave for Italy. Therese was on her way to bid her farewell, and would I care to come along? I dressed in my good suit, and we took off.

It seemed that Lilly had left "Laura", shortly after I did, to work for a vase decorator. We were to pick her up at work located quite far at the edge of the city. On the way I learned that Lilly had left "Laura" because she had not made enough money there to live on. Decorating vases was piece work, and now Lilly was still not making enough money to pay her rent and also eat. This was why she was going to return to her family in Naples.

Lilly seemed quite pleased to see us. Plunged in conversation about ourselves, we walked slowly to the streetcar terminal from where we would ride home. There was an attractive small café where we installed ourselves to enjoy each other a little longer over a lemonade.

Suddenly, Therese got up, apologized for being in a hurry, and before we could say anything, she had run out the door to a streetcar which promptly left. Lilly and I blushed with embarrassment. Our conversation faltered. Finally, I ask her to spend an evening with me before leaving for Italy. She agreed and we decided to go to a concert. As we were about to part, the sirens wailed and a bombing prolonged our being together.

Anne sat at my right and worked under my supervision. She was very pleasant to have around, creating in the studio a warm and friendly atmosphere. Occasionally, Ernst and I broke the monotony of work with a song, usually Viennese. Anne, who played the piano, teased us about being off key, but would join us when she could.

Anne was also very gregarious, and sometimes spoiled our mood by relating gory stories about Gestapo activities.

I don't remember why Ernst and Margit joined Lilly and me to go to the concert, nor can I recall what the concert was, except that we were quite satisfied with the performance. I do remember that afterwards, the weather being so nice, we went for a walk. And I do recall that many a man turned for a second look at the gifts nature had bestowed on Lilly.

Eventually, Lilly and I went one way, Margit and Ernst the other. As we walked aimlessly through the city, Lilly confided in me about her problems, her reasons for leaving.

Her lovely presence, her soft voice were seductive, and before I knew it, I was telling her about our predicament. Next I was suggesting that she should stay. I could earn enough to pay the rent, and assure the support of us both. Of course, my residence with Lilly would have to be an illegal one, but after the war we could get married. In the meantime, living together would allow us to know each other, etc, etc.

While I was saying all this, I could not believe what I was saying. Did I love the girl, or was it just that I wanted to escape from home?

I was sure that in my eagerness I had gone too far, but Lilly seemed actually touched by my proposal. Did she care for me? Quite confused, I hastily insisted that she give the matter considerable thought before making a decision which could involve grave consequences for her.

When we parted, she offered me her lips, and with moist eyes promised that she would stay.

From that day on till the day set for Lilly's departure I was a nervous wreck waiting for her decision. There was nothing for me to say about it at home until a decision had been reached. I could have gotten in touch with her to help her make up her mind, but I wanted to be sure of her.

Maybe it was my silence which prompted her to leave after all. Maybe it was just careful considerations on her part, but leave she did.

Therese informed me, Lilly had told her that she was leaving against her desire, and that she had cried.

Several month later, I heard that Lilly had written she was happy to be home and all was well with her.

July 1943. I was helping Mr. Dirkx with an advertisement for a new recording of the "Don Juan" by Richard Strauss, under the direction of Charles Houdret. It was very warm. We cut cardboard, painted, illustrated and lettered. The pay was good, the work a pleasant change from what I ordinarily did, and Dirkx also fed me lunch.

Emil and I had discovered a new place for our walking. The "Etangs de Woluwe." After all, the "Bois de la Cambre" was too close to Gestapo Headquarters for comfort.

We went on Saturday or on Sunday, and because of the raids this was quite and undertaking. But then at home, the Nazis could get one as easy as elsewhere. Once at the lake we felt quite safe, and searched for a quiet spot on one of the lawns, where we would lie on our backs, have philosophical discussions or watch clouds travel the blue sky, more than once wishing we could ride along.

Emil's brother, Louis, was a student of music. I very rarely met him. I can say, that Louis, just like Emil's father, disapproved of our friendship. Anyway, on this day, Louis came along to the park. We had rented a rowboat and because all of them were in use, we waited our turn. It was a hot day. We walked around aimlessly trying to stay in the shade. Couples holding hands walked by us in a never ending stream, whispering and giggling. They certainly had more fun than we had watching them. Louis and I agreed that there was no use to sit in a boat and bore oneself, and we insisted that Emil should pick up some good looking girls, who were probably as bored as we were without the proper company of the opposite sex. We assigned this job to Emil, because we did not have any expertise in such delicate matters. He with a weary air of experience voiced all kinds of objections, but these did not help him, and finally he took off, went straight for two ladies and introduced himself. A few words were exchanged, he nodded and returned alone.

Louis advised me to keep our observation unmentioned. So, we asked Emil harmlessly, if he had seen anything worth while. He told us furiously of his misadventure and suggested, in no uncertain terms, that in the future we well would have to do our own picking. Subdued and disappointed, we went to the dock, got in a boat, rowed ourselves to the center of the lake, pulled in the oars and tried to relax. The coolness of the water provided a welcome relief from the heat. All was quiet except for some water lapping at the boat.

"Do you see the two girls sitting at the edge of the water?" This inquiry came from Louis. Emil, on his back staring at the sky didn't bother to look. I stretched my neck: "Where?"

"There!" said Louis, "they don't look half bad. Besides", he went on, "there are two guys trying their best to get acquainted with them."

I stared till my eyes hurt, but could not see what Louis was talking about. That I could not find something obvious with my "four" eyes stirred Emil from his indifference. He looked, mumbled to himself, then suggested that we row a little closer to the event. I picked up the oars, Louis directed, and finally I saw the girls and their accosters, all about seventeen years old.

Emil snorted derisively: "Just children!" (I was nineteen, he twenty. Louis eighteen.)

The situation was however interesting, because the two fellows who had been making overtures to the girls, now received competition from two other guys who had pulled up to the girls in a boat. All these fellows now talked to the girls who pretended to ignore them.

Louis took the oars. And as we kept approaching, I played a song on my mouth-organ while the girls looked placidly at the sky.

As we were floating by, I coughed, swallowed and said, "Mademoiselles, would you care to take a ride with us?"

"Thank you very much," one of them indulged in answering, "We have tickets for a boat ourselves."

Emil and Louis grinned at me sarcastically. I could not quit then.

"This is wonderful indeed," I suggested, "then we could continue with your tickets when our time runs out."

First the girls looked at each other, then they whispered to each other, then one said they thought our idea was good, and they would come for a ride with us, providing I would continue to play the mouth-organ.

The faces of our rivals turned somber as the girls got into our boat.

We managed to sneer at them, and took off. While we went through the formalities of introducing ourselves, one of the jilted fellows threw a dead fish after us.

One of the girls introduced herself as Lucie, the other as Andrée.

One sat with Emil, the other with Louis. I sat in the back of the boat and played till my throat got sore, while Louis, and Emil who had forgotten to be grouchy, had a great time.

Suddenly one of the girls shouted excitedly about water being in the boat now, when there had not been any a little while ago.

Sure enough, by the time we calmed Lucie, water was up to our ankles.

It was quickly established that the boat was sinking and that not one of us could swim.

There was a scramble for the oars and with some serious rowing we aimed the sinking craft to the nearest land.

This must have been quite a spectacle.

From along the shore people watched us with interest. Some laughed heartily.

Finally, we reached land, jumped to safety, and after having regained our poise, we emptied some water from the boat, and sent Emil back with it to the dock and the angry boat owner.

(The rule was, not more than four to a boat).

Sitting, where we were, on the sunny lawn, we rang our socks out and waited for Emil. By the time he returned, we were better acquainted with the girls. That is, we knew Lucie liked to read novels and Andrée preferred to talk. All in all we were not impressed. We went for a little walk, and as evening came, anxious to get away, we parted. But there was Louis who, to our anger, arranged a date with the girls for the following Sunday!

On the streetcar, we discussed the matter. I was not sure I should go. After all we did not know these girls. Better to be safe than to be sorry. We almost decided not to go, but we had made a date and we were going to keep it. However, we decided to be right on time and not wait should the girls not be there

At Dirkx', I learned of the arrest of Begam and his father. They had been caught trying to get to southern France. Mrs. Begam who had remained in Brussels had gone into hiding. We were saddened by this news of the arrest of the poet and his father. Especially Ernst, who had become well acquainted with the Begam family and had received much kindness from them, was very shaken.

The following Sunday, Emil and I went to our date. Louis could not make it. We arrived seven minutes late and were relieved not to see the girls. Hardly stopping at the appointed place we went on our walk.

When we arrived at our streetcar stop in the evening to return to the city, Emil said, "There they are!"

"Who?" I wondered, but already I saw the girls. It was too late to avoid them. "Destiny!" I mumbled, not knowing how right I was.

"My goodness, what a shame we missed each other..." and so on. "Well, let's try again next Sunday."

Louis came along on the next Sunday. The girls were on time. Lucie's mama had come along to look us over. She insisted she had to know her daughter's friends before she allowed any dating. Chubby and short, she had a thick mane of red hair and was rather sympathetic. Emil carried the brunt of the conversation, and I must say that he did very well.

We decided on a long walk towards Tervueren, hoping maliciously that Lucie's mother would tire and bid us farewell.

We walked in a row. At the left Lucie's mother, then Emil, Lucie, Andrée, Louis, and I literally in Louis' shadow. He was taller and larger than I.

We had walked all of four miles, and I had managed to keep my mouth shut. Finally, Mama did show signs of fatigue.

At "Quatre Bras" we stopped for some refreshments. Sitting on metal chairs around a metal table, sipping lemonade, we were aware of the merciless July sun.

I had to perform on the mouth-organ before Mama informed us that she was satisfied with the company her daughter found herself in, and expressed hope that we should have a good time. We took Mama to a streetcar, then went on a very pleasant walk through the Tervueren woods.

Arrived at a clearing, we sat down to rest. By then we were befriended enough with the girls to tease them, and search for berries with them. Lucie seemed to be attracted to me. She managed to keep at my side, and as I found her likable, we talked more and more to each other. Andrée, more attractive than Lucie, bothered me by her gregariousness and I kept avoiding her.

I was sorry when the work with Dirkx was finished because I rather was with the Dirkxs than with anyone else.

"Well, Hermann, we will see you on Sunday," said Mr. Dirkx when we parted.

The small attic window did not admit much light. No matter how bright the sun, my room was dark. However, upon awakening, I could always see what the weather was like.

The morning of July 21, 1943, was sunny and bright. I wanted to get up and leave the unpleasantness of my room, but I was too tired. Besides, I did not hear my stepfather tinkering with breakfast dishes on the floor below.

His preparation of the "coffee" was my signal to get up. It meant that everyone downstairs was done with their morning toilette and I could get to the sink to wash and shave.

For a moment I wondered why no one was up yet, then I remembered that this was Belgian's Independence Day. Otherwise aunt Rose and Rita would have been here. Rose had gotten into the habit of stopping by on her way to the store at about eight in the morning. I had gotten into the habit of looking forward to their visits, because the two and one half year old Rita was such a delight. With her large blue eyes and her curly blond hair she was cute as a doll and a heart-warming sight. She had an amazing musical memory and entertained us by singing the latest songs. Also, she wore a happy smile, which these days was rarely seen except on infants.

Should I be working when they came, Rita would invariably watch me for a while then run to her mother to tell her what I was doing. Should Margit still be in bed, Rita would scold her for being in bed so late. If no response was forthcoming, she pulled Margit's blankets off. One by one, until my sister would get up.

Rita had never seen an orange or a banana, or chocolate. She would say, "When the war is over, I will get chocolate and bananas."

When the war is over!

Unhappily I stared at the gray wall covered with brown spots that testified to my battle with the bed bugs. On the chair next to my bed was the libretto to the opera "Tosca" I had borrowed from Anne. This was a good time to start reading it. At first I had difficulties concentrating, wondering why people bothered to write tragedies when there was so much of it in life.

The story proved to be interesting though, and I became absorbed in it. After a while I arrived at the exclamation "Come brother to victory or death!" Some thoughts tend to remain fashionable throughout the ages, I mused. Did poets have to remind us of what otherwise could be forgotten?

"To victory or death!" I shrugged and put the book aside.

Just then the doorbell rang five times. This was for us. Who could it be? Family or friends never bothered to ring the bell. Perhaps it was someone with work for my stepfather or for me. I heard him go downstairs and wearily began to dress.

Was this my stepfather who came running upstairs? Anxiety overcame me. I had never seen or heard him run. Something was wrong.

Hastily, I slipped into my trousers. He did not stop at the apartment but came directly to the attic, almost falling over the last steps. Then he hammered with his fists on my door: "The..the..Gestapo is at Rose's...quick!" he shouted, and stumbled back downstairs.

The door of our apartment slammed dryly behind him. Then I heard his excited voice once more, followed by a heartrending outcry from my mother.
Her voice, distorted by terror and pain, kept calling her sister's name.

For some horrible moments I was unable to move. Somehow, I finished dressing and got downstairs.

My mother's eyes were fearfully large. With trembling hands she made futile attempts to wipe tears from her face. I hurried to the window and looked into the sun-drenched street. In front of my aunt's house was one of the dreaded black limousines. Its doors and the door of the house were wide open. A few people stood around staring. Otherwise, the street was quiet, such as it always was on a holiday.

I turned back to the room where mother cried, and my stepfather helped a stunt and very pale Margit dress.

Now my mother kept saying, "Go away, go away and safe yourselves..."

Minutes later we were in the street. My parents turned one way, Margit and I the other. We walked fast and in wordless shock.

I tried to think of some logical action. First I had to talk things over with Emil, calm down. I had to find a place for Margit to stay, to hide. I did not want to go back home either. Surely one was always exposed to the Gestapo, no matter where one was, but to do something, to act, to move made one almost feel human, worthy of life.

(Later we learned that the wife of a shoemaker who worked part-time as a policeman, and who lived across the street from Rose's, had come to warn us.)

I hesitated before I rang the bell at Emil's home. It was not nine o'clock yet. A little early for an unexpected call. How would his parents receive us?

Emil was greatly disturbed by the news, but did not know what to do. I had not really expected help, but talking to him calmed me. The plans we had often enough entertained in case of an emergency had failed to consider his parents. They would see to it that Emil would not go beyond kind words and a friendly concern. His mother was a kind person who liked me, it seemed, but his father never approved of our friendship. I was often embarrassed by the friction our friendship caused in his home, both father and son being very stubborn. It was not long before I sensed the uselessness of this meeting, and worried about wasting time, I apologized for our visit, and we left.

The Dirkx's astonishment at seeing us so unexpectedly turned to dismay when they learned the reason for our visit. Immediately, they offered to shelter Margit until something "better" could be found for her. Knowing how dangerous it would be for them to have me there also, not to speak of their lack of space, I insisted that shelter for Margit was all I was looking for and that I would be all right. However, before I left, I washed and shaved, and ate something, and promised to come back later should I encounter difficulties.

Their concern was genuine, and I knew, should anything happen to me and my parents, Margit was in good hands.

I decided to check back home before doing anything else. Maybe on the way I could figure out what to do next. What was there for me to do? Searching my mind for inspiration where there was none, I grew quite morose. They finally had gotten close to us. Rosel and Simon were gone, Trude, Hertha, Herbert, Ernst and Rita. Gone! Lintschi's husband, Herrmann. Uncle Siggi, my stepfather's brother.

In Holland, Sidonia, her husband, my stepfather's sister Hilda, her husband and child, gone. Uncle Kobi and Leo were in France. Or were they still there? I did not want to count those who were still left.

It was all so depressing. When would our turn come? Who would be next?

If hope was the reason for living I had better find some.

The rue de Moulin laid quietly in the sunshine. Not noticing anything suspicious, I walked slowly to the house. Cautiously I ascended the creaky stairs, ready to run at the smallest provocation.

Suddenly, I heard the voices of my parents and of uncle Simon, and hastily climbed the last flight. Uncle Simon stood in the middle of the kitchen a towel in his hands, his face swollen from crying. He saw me, and sobbing anew, beat his chest: "My child! My poor, little innocent child!"

I wanted to say something but remained speechless.

My red-eyed parents asked me about Margit, and I assured them that she was safe. The door to the bedroom opened and Ernst appeared. So, he too had escaped! I did not dare ask how. Only later did I learn what had happened.

The Gestapo had entered the house using a key. Aunt Rose, who by chance had just stepped to the window, saw them. She leaped for Rita and ran with her for the attic, but did not get there, because coming up the staircase, the Germans heard her. Ernst was going to run for the attic also. He saw the Germans in the staircase the same time they saw him. They ordered him downstairs, but he instead slipped back into the apartment and bolted the door before the Germans reached it.

Some time ago, Simon had fashioned a hiding place on top of a closet, meant for Rose and the baby. It could only be reached by someone being able to climb up there, and it only held two people. But Rita was screaming her head off.

When the Germans broke through the door, Ernst and Simon were in the hiding place. They laid quietly on a blanket on the false ceiling, listening fearfully to Rita shriek while the Germans pushed her and Rose downstairs and to the waiting car.

Hertha was caught sitting on her bed, stunned. While Rita cried about not wanting to go, two of the six Nazis looked for Ernst. They tore furniture apart, went fuming through closets. They did not know of Simon's presence, couldn't find Ernst and finally left with Rose, Hertha and Rita.

I should remind you here, that Trude and Herbert had been deported a few month earlier. Grandma Helena Kaplan, lived by then alone in a room in the house where Lintschi lived.

Simon and Ernst stayed in the hiding place wondering if the Nazis would come back. And indeed they did return to have one more look for Ernst.

There was nothing to be done but to hope for the best. Ernst was pale and quiet. Simon looked terrible, but eventually he calmed down, and the two went to his mother, grandma Helena.

I feared now that the Germans had Rose they would come for us. After talking about this possibility with my parents, it was decided that mother should stay with Lintschi for a few days. I don't remember where my step-father went. While I wondered about a solution to my own lodging problem, Walter, Poldi's son, arrived. When he heard what happened, he told me to go to Herbert Schuler who lived in the rue Portugal, gave me directions, and assured me that I would be able to stay with Schuler a few days.

On my way, I realized that I knew Schuler vaguely. He had been one of the students at the AREPROR. Walter had gone there also, and I believe it was there that he and Walter had become friends.

It was evening when I reached Schuler's place. There were no names on the apartment bells at the street door. I rang the people on the first floor to ask for him. An elderly, somewhat worn woman, opened the street door. She admitted me grudgingly and led me downstairs where she pushed a bell to Schuler's room, assuring me unpleasantly that he might not be in.

But already Schuler called from the top of the dark staircase. Relieved to know him home, I hastened upstairs. Between the second and third floor, I began to wonder whether he was on the third or the fourth floor, and which of the many doors would be his.

"Herbert?" I asked cautiously.

"Ya, here I am, all the way up."

All the way up, I found an unobtrusive crooked door to the left leading to an empty room with a faucet and sink. There was another door, not quite shut, from which some light fell. Through it, I found myself in a small hallway with still another door at its end. This one seemed to be the one to Herbert's room. I heard some shuffling behind it:

"Well, are you coming?"

"Yes, here I am," I said as I entered, " Not easy to find."

He laughed, "But perfectly legal." We shook hands. "Make yourself at home."

His friendly welcome made me feel better. That he was not at all surprised to have my visit meant that Walter had been in touch with him.

"You are late," Schuler said," I was beginning to worry."

I apologized and explained that I had to return some free-lance work I had at home. Also, I had done a lot of running around trying to find a place for Ernst to stay. Schuler nodded while I talked, and prepared the bed. "You must be tired," he said, "and anyhow, I get up at five. Under me lives an engineer who works with Walter at the airport. He gets up at five and his radio goes on, and I get up. The speaker here over the bed is connected to his radio.

"Ah, we still have to think up a good story to make your stay here plausible. Of course, you can stay here a few days."

I thanked him, assured him that I did not plan to stay long.

"Perhaps tomorrow...If only I can get a good night's rest."

My legs felt heavy, and my eyes burned with fatigue. Yet, I slept poorly and resented the military march that woke us promptly at five. Through the window I noticed the first light of the coming day, and I wondered where my little cousin Rita was.

That day, after a great deal of walking, I finally received an address for Ernst from a former employer of mine. I had hardly anything to eat since I left the Dirkxs on the previous day, but although I felt weak, I was not hungry.

In the evening, I met the engineer who lived under Schuler. I told him the story we had decided on the night before. Namely, that I worked in Antwerp at a steel mill that produces rails. Now on a short vacation, while also short on cash, I had decided to visit the big city. But because I had no family here, I stayed with my dear friend Schuler, rather than to stay at a hotel. Fortunately, the engineer did not think of asking me questions which could have easily embarrassed me. As it turned out, the witchy lady who had let me in the house the day before, was the engineer's mother. She joined us before the evening was over, and since she and her son were very talkative, it was rather late before I went to bed.

The next day, I went to Dirkx to wash and shave. There I learned that Margit was staying with the Van Gucht, the people who had been having her for dinner so much. I assured my worried friends that I was alright, and left for Woluwe, where I had a date with Lucie, Andrée and Emil. Emil was to have informed Lucie of my predicament. This was taking a chance, but I was pretty desperate and had decided to gamble on Lucie's seeming affection for me.

Lucie was clearly upset by the news she had received from Emil, and she suggested a conference with her mother. So, to Andrée's astonishment we all went to Lucie's mother. Andrée did not know what was going on.

Lucie's mother, who lived with three other children in a labor district near Laeken, received us warmly. She offered us "coffee" which pleased me to no end.

We knew that there was no man in the family, but did not know why.

Now we sat around looking at photo albums and talking silly talk with three small children, Lucie's siblings, and I was nervous about all that precious time slipping by.

Finally, Lucie maneuvered her mother into another room. A little while later she returned to fetch me for a moment. I did not know what to expect. Having not known about the three small children, I was uneasy now of becoming a threat to their safety, and was prepared to apologize for intruding. However, Lucie's mother offered me her sympathy and assured me that she would help me all she could. For the time being, I should consider her home my shelter. She then showed me a room which I could occupy.

Well, I was vastly relieved. Things would work out after all.

It was decided that I would return in two days, after nine in the evening and slip into the apartment unobserved.

So we left Lucie's home brimming with optimism. Emil was going to help me with my free-lance work, picking it up and delivering it if necessary. Lucie too was delighted. As we walked along, I either talked with Lucie or Emil while they took turns diverting Andrée. Of course, by this time, Andrée had become suspicious of our whispering and it seemed that she was offended.

But we went on with our talking and planning, and the more we did, the more I became fearful that something would go wrong. It all seemed too easy somehow.

By streetcar we took the girls to Woluwe St. Lambert, where both worked and lived. When we got there it was raining. Taking up shelter in a café, excited as we were, Andrée excepted, we really splurged by ordering hot chocolate.

My parents returned to the old flat. They had decided that destiny could catch up with one any place, and that there was no use trying to escape it. In spite of this philosophy they were happy that Margit and I were well taken care of.

Margit was still at the Van Gucht's who had taken her along on their vacation to their cottage in "Ivoire". Ernst had been placed at a monastery by the people I had sent him to. His father Simon remained with his mother.

(Ernst spent the rest of the war at this monastery. I know he was able to go out, because we met at times, but he refused to talk about the monastery and I don't even know where it is.)

This was the day I was to move in with Lucie's mother. Because I could not go there till nine p.m., it was going to be a long day. I loathed the idea of roaming the streets till then, and feeling the need for some rest, I went to Dirkx in the afternoon. I told them of my prospects, but they were not delighted with the setup and felt that I should return home.

Their unexpected attitude rekindled in me a certain uneasiness I had felt about the arrangement with Lucie's mother. But, on the other hand, I had a strong feeling not wanting to go back home.

Somewhat discouraged, I left the Dirkxs sooner than expected and walked around trying to think, to raise my mood. I did not have a lot of options. To survive one needs resources. It was as simple as that.

At a bakery I had a small tart for dinner. It tasted like glue. Then I took a streetcar to the Woluwe terminal, which was in front of the cemetery of Etterbeek gate, where I was to meet Emil and Lucie at eight p.m.

Emil was there and we waited for Lucie. In view of the fact that I had a room with a bed, a promise of security, I felt pretty good.

I should say that *we* felt pretty good, because Emil's concern for me had affected him deeply. Anyway, Lucie arrived. She was to phone her mother to signal that we were on our way. There was a phone booth at the terminal and she made the call. Low and behold, a lady friend of Lucie's mother answered the phone with the message that mother had left for a stay in the country. We spent the following few minutes calming Lucie who was visibly shaken. Emil too was quite upset. To my surprise I was not. Maybe subconsciously I had not expected this scheme to work. After all we had overwhelmed the woman with our unexpected bad news two days ago, and she had time to think things over.

She would take some extraordinary risks for a total stranger. It could have been terrible for me to have her three small children on my conscious. Lucie had not been aware of her mother's change of heart, but then Lucie did not live with her mother. She lived where she worked as a maid.

Anyway, it was nearly nine p.m., the sun was low on the horizon and I had no place to go.

Lucie insisted on talking to her employer, but I did not expect much of that. She left never the-less to see him, while Emil and I remained in front of the cemetery gate seeking inspiration.

Emil kept looking at his watch. He should have been home long ago, there was this eight o’clock curfew, but he refused to leave me though I kept sending him home.

There were two immediate possibilities. One, I could climb the cemetery wall and spend the night there. This was not an inviting idea, but I would be safer there than on the street. Second, I could take the streetcar to Tervueren and spent the night in the woods there. These were more inviting than the cemetery, but the Germans patrolled the woods during the night.

While talking, Emil and I walked slowly away from the terminal at the cemetery into the avenue Louis Gribaumont. The cemetery was on one end of the avenue, the streetcar for Tervueren on the other. Although it was beginning to get dark by then, I did recognize the young girl coming toward us. It was Andrée.

Because she had no idea of what was going on, nor that we were anywhere near where she lived, she was astonished to see us. (Like Lucie, Andrée worked as a maid in one of the apartment buildings on the avenue.) At this point, I was ready to even trust her, and without further ceremony told her of my dilemma.

The horror that came into her expressive face revealed that up to this moment, at least, she had led a sheltered life. She must have heard of the persecution of the Jews, but this was certainly her first personal contact with it. Poor kid! I should have kept my mouth shut.

But right then and there we learned how very much we had misjudged that girl. She stopped saying "My God" and "Good Lord", and displayed a sudden resoluteness and maturity which was as unexpected as it was reassuring to me.

"I will talk to my employer and to our neighbor who is a baptized Jew. One of them will have to help you!" Apparently, to her there was no question about that. "Wait here," she went on, "I will be back in a few minutes."

Andrée had scarcely left when Lucie returned. Long-faced she told us that her employer had no intention of helping me. This was really what I had expected. Why should the man stick his neck out? And I wondered, why should Andrée's employer have a different attitude?

Silently we stood in the declining daylight waiting for Andrée. When she returned, she told us that neither her employer nor her neighbor had come home as yet, and that their wives did not want to make a decision without consulting their husband.

No sooner had Andrée told us this when she added that she had just seen her employer enter the apartment building. She turned and ran up the street.

This time, Andrée stayed away longer. She returned with a handsome German-Jewish looking gentleman who, I thought, was her neighbor. He asked Emil if "he" was "the" young man, which was logical because Emil looked far more Jewish than I. The error corrected, he proposed a little walk through the field behind the seven story apartment building where he lived.

"I will be glad to offer you shelter for tonight", he said, "In a little while I will take our dog for a walk, and then we will go back into the building together."

I thanked him. He shook his head and I returned to the terminal with the good news. Lucie threw herself around my neck and left. She was overdue at home. Emil, obviously happy, also left hastily. Slowly, I walked the Avenue Brockeville to the apartment building, then stood across the street in the dark.

I did not have to wait long. Soon someone appeared in the building's broad entrance. In the beam of a flashlight, a white fox terrier ran happily into the street. It was Andrée who called the dog and whistled softly. I went towards her faster than I wanted to. She smiled at me, whistled for the dog once more, then put her finger to her lips inviting me to silence, and whispered, "come quickly."

While she busied herself with the lock on the glass door in the back of the foyer, I advanced toward her on my toes to get by the concierge's window unnoticed. A dimly lit open elevator was waiting on the left of the door. Andrée, dog on the leash now, was waiting for me to get in the elevator before she let the foyer door lock itself, then quickly and quietly she joined me. The elevator rose to the third floor.

Excitement has a way of dealing with fatigue. Earlier, when we were standing at the cemetery gate wondering what to do, I had worried about how much longer I would be able to stand on my feet. I did not feel tired at all when I entered the elegant apartment. I was alert and impressed with the beauty of the place, something I had only seen in magazines before.

The lady of the house appeared, greeted me, and said that she was sure I was tired. There was a guest room ready for me where she hoped I would find a restful night. Tomorrow would be another day, and we would see then what could be done. The man joined us. He and Andrée led me to a room at the end of a L shaped hall. I was wished a pleasant night. Tiphram, the dog, sniffed me once more with an understandable curiosity, then I was alone.

The window was properly blacked out. The modern white furniture in the white room, was drenched in the soft light of a floor lamp. I stood there for a while in awe on the thick red carpet, before I turned the light out, and pulled the heavy drape aside. The night was black, but the sky was permeated with countless stars. I stared for a moment, then suddenly felt very tired.

The large bed was soft, the fresh sheets felt luxurious. I tried to think of what to do in the morning, but soon gave up. I wanted to enjoy this wonderful bed, this temporary security. Tomorrow will come soon enough.

A very quiet house, I thought, and so pleasant. Andrée had told me that a German Air Force officer lived below and a Gestapo agent above.

I still thought I was at Andrée's neighbor; the baptized Jew.

I cannot remember having slept better anytime, anywhere. Now that I was awake, I was unhappy that day had come already. It still was very early, but my worrisome thoughts kept me from going back to sleep. I stretched voluptuously between the crisp sheets, and noticed to my distress that my feet were glued to them. Covered with calluses, they had bled during the night.

The door opened slowly and silently, and just enough to let a small hand slip through, throw a bath towel on the bed and then withdraw.

Andrée was really a very nice person. How could I have misjudged her so? I remembered, one time when we were on a streetcar platform, I played the mouth-organ while she talked and talked. Annoyed, I told her that she sounded like a mad chicken. Only my swiftness prevented a slap in my face.

My friends had been quite amused. Reminiscing, I grinned. That girl had all kinds of spunk. Not such a bad quality at that.

Hastily, I dressed. Having slept well, I felt much better.

Someone seemed to be in the kitchen. It was Andrée, and I was surprised to find her there. Before I could ask her about it, the man of the house appeared and told me that I could sleep at his apartment two more nights. Otherwise he could not offer me any help. It was too dangerous. He did give me several addresses of trustworthy people and suggested I try my luck with them.

After Andrée served my hosts their breakfast in the dining room, she and I ate hot cereal and drank hot chocolate in the kitchen. This is when I found out that I was not at her neighbor's place and lucky not to have been there. The neighbor died during the night of a heart attack!

Andrée had put enough food before me to feed a giant, but I was not able to eat much.

First I went home to see how things were going there. Everything was "all right". I assured mother that I was well hidden and well taken care of, then went to see Polak to tell him about my status quo.

Anne, who I had hoped to see, was not at work. She had not been there for several days. Polak gave me her address and I realized she lived just a couple of blocks from Andrée. Well, before I was going to see her, I wanted to check the people who had been recommended to me by Andrée's boss. It would probably be best to have Emil along. He was so much more eloquent than I.

The day passed quickly. We had been to everyone on the list. One was a coffin maker, another ran a laundry. All small business people. Called on them at their place of business. Most expressed sympathy for me and promised to keep their eyes open, and let me know, etc. A few frankly told us that they could not help.

Moody as Emil was, he was terribly optimistic one moment and quite depressed the next. After having exhausted my possibilities, we both were depressed.

Anne lived with her parents in a beautiful single-family brick home. Even though our visit was unannounced, Anne received us warmly and introduced us to her parents. Her appearance was so different from theirs, one would not guess she was their daughter. Her mother was a tall, thin, dark woman, who, as I already knew, suffered from a tropical illness. Indeed, her complexion was a strange brownish green. Her father, a professor of English, was small, dainty, with a small, round and very bald head, foreseen with thick, metal-rimmed glasses. As long as I am describing the parents, I should add that Anne was a perfectly well proportioned good looking dark-blond, with a clear pink skin and sparkling light blue eyes. Only her voice, which sometimes flipped, seemed to tie her to her father.

We were immediately aware that these people believed strongly in mannerism, and also that it embarrassed Anne. Everything said was correctly spoken and carefully enunciated, and accompanied by measured gestures.

By the time tea was served, I had almost forgotten my predicament and had to concentrate on not laughing.

Eventually, of course, I told Anne about my dilemma and at once was sorry having done so, for she began to cry hysterically.

Obviously annoyed, her parents found everything regrettable. Shaking their heads and "tsking" a few times, they attempted to calm Anne. They told us about their patriotism, offered us another cup of tea and assured us that the news on the BBC, they bravely listened to, was very good, and that soon the nasty Germans would be gone.

Anne sat through all this wringing her hankie, crying quietly.

I feared she would fall on her knees to implore her parents to do something. Emil seemed as plagued as I by the scene, although we both appreciated Anne's sympathy. However, her anguish, contrasted by the cold displeasure of her parents, was enough to make us want to jump out the window. We glanced at each other and remembered an important appointment. I assured Anne, who did not believe one word I said, that for the time being I was well taken care of, and apologized for our unannounced visit. Anne forced a smile, as we, disappointed and exhausted, left.

I walked Emil to the streetcar. Then I waited for Andrée to walk Tiphram, and re-entered my temporary haven.

Sitting at the kitchen table, eating cereal left from this morning, too rich to go down easily, I listened to Andrée tell me that she may have found a room for me at a friend's home.

Of course, it was not a sure thing as yet, and having had so many rejections this long day, I failed to get excited about the latest promise.

The next day, I was on my way early and alone. Only one more night of shelter ahead. Not wanting to beg for additional hospitality, I simply had to find something. Went to everyone I could think of, had some kind receptions, some unpleasant ones, but by the end of the day my efforts had proven futile once more, and I almost got caught in a raid.

Dirkx had again advised me to go home. But sensing my discouragement and my objection to his advice, he proposed that he would contact seven trusted friends and work out some plan, so I could stay at the home of each one day a week. Before I went on my way, the Dirkxs insisted I share their modest dinner (The main meal of the day in Western Europe at 1 p.m.).

I was also given some cigarettes.

Of course, the best sustenance I received from the Dirkxs was their genuine concern and care. Their friendship gave me comfort that day and on many other occasions. When I thought about it, his plan of rotating shelter with seven friends seemed not very good. Not only would I have to spend a great deal of time circulating in the streets, but also I would endanger seven families. Still, could I refuse the offer?

I was quite worn out and depressed when I followed my host (Baron de Heel) and Tiphram to their apartment. It was he and not Andrée who had walked the dog that evening. With "Ah, I have news for you," the lady of the house greeted me at the door. *'Oi way'*! I thought. News was usually bad, and from the expression on her handsome face there was no telling what kind of news she had.

"Andrée will tell you more when she returns from the people she told you about yesterday. I believe things will work out."

I sat in the kitchen nursing my fatigue. Andrée had come, but having been busy with her employers had not been to the kitchen yet. I did not allow myself hope or excitement. Disappointment was so exhausting.

Before long, the Baron came in the kitchen and sat at the table facing me. He had been a lawyer and a Belgian Air Force officer. Of course, I did not know what he was doing now.

"Well, we do have a place for you" he said," but you can have it only on one condition."

I looked at him expectantly, a bit taken aback by “condition", and he went on, "The condition is that Lucie remains uninformed of your where-abouts."

This requirement seemed peculiar, but of course, I agreed. I could see Lucie elsewhere if we wanted to see each other.

Anyway, this situation appeared to be very promising, but I suppose I was too tired to work up much excitement yet.

Andrée planned to take me to see my new abode in the morning, as soon as we had fabricated a plausible story concerning my identity. Those people would not be told the truth.

108 rue des Menusiers, was gray stucco, perfectly unremarkable, well suited for my residence. Andrée pulled the bell at the faded green entrance. It did not ring, but fulfilled its function by squeaking and rattling instead. Then we entered - the door was not locked - and found ourselves in the presence of a small, outraged dog who had come flying at us from behind a glass door at the end of the corridor barking his bastard head off.

From the room that had produced the animal, came a hoarse feminine voice in a heavy Flemish brogue: "MIRSA! God damn it!" At the same time, a tall, small-eyed, bemoustached man appeared. He was in his early forties, had a slim, upright figure, a rather creased and somber face in which he attempted to hang a smile.

"Ah, it's you," he mumbled, where-upon we followed him, dog at our heels, past the glass door into the kitchen. A bit more cursing changed Mirsa's bark into a subdued growl. Andrée introduced me to the Cauberghs.

The lady, though small, looked somehow like a boxer. I imagined however that she was not, because she wore thick glasses. Like her husband, she had small black eyes which scrutinized me curiously while she smiled broadly. And, though some of her teeth were missing, her smile was warm and friendly.

I told them that I was from Charleroi, a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and because commuting had become so difficult, I wanted a modest room until trains would run on schedule once more. Since this was only a matter of time, I wished I could be saved the trouble of reporting my residence to the local authorities as this would entail annoying changes of ration cards, etc.

This was really not a very good story. A new resident had to be reported to the local precinct within three days. Disregarding this law was no small matter. But Andrée had promised that the story would be perfectly acceptable, and indeed so it was. Mr. Caubergh assured me that he understood, and his wife kept smiling. Fortunately, they did not think of asking to see any identification, for all I had was my "Jew" card.

Andrée asked to be allowed to show me the room to see whether or not *it suited me*. We went upstairs to the mansard on the third floor. In spite of the usual attic skylight, the place was quite bright. There was a large iron bed, a table, two chairs, a washbasin and a closet. As soon as I saw the room, all my doubts vanished and I knew *this was it*. I found it difficult to suppress my sudden joy, but it was necessary that I did not appear unusually excited.

I made the customary inquiry about bed bugs, and Madam made the customary denial. Then I inquired about water, toilet, and of course the rent.

The rent was 100 francs a month! ($ 2.50) Less than a days earnings for me. God has given me a present, I thought. Many people would have given a fortune for a place like this.

I told Mrs. Caubergh that the room was acceptable, and she told me that I could move in whenever convenient.

Under me, on the second floor, lived one of the landlord's sons whose wife was a friend of Andrée's. We went to them so I could be introduced, and I was offered the story of their courtship. Of course, I was in an expansive mood and listened gladly to their tale of romance.

These people were simple, open and kind. They were light-haired, slender, healthy looking, in their mid-twenties. Their modest circumstances had not dented their pleasant disposition.

As soon as I could, I rushed off to inform the Dirkxs and Emil of my good fortune. They were as elated as I. The temporary nature of the arrangement bothered me some, but then everything was temporary, including the war. Somehow things would work out. How could I ever thank Andrée? Not only had I been a stranger to her, but one who had not been particularly friendly.

The Caubergh's French was atrocious, their Flemish was a brogue spoken by the simplest of folks. They could not detect my accent. Besides, it was most unlikely that they were interested in German racial policies. I could not have picked a better hiding place if I had any choice in the matter. The way things arranged themselves for me was a perfect argument for a belief in fate, or guardian angels.

Because I did not have much to move, moving in was no problem. Emil helped me, and in a few days I was free-lancing again, decorating hankies and lampshades. I also retouched photographs for Polak at home now.

On the first day of my residence at 108 rue des Menusiers, I met Albert, the landlord's youngest son who was ten years old.

The son on the second floor, Charles, and his wife suggested that for a modest sum I could have dinner with them each day. Accepting gratefully, as I could not cook in my room, I suspected that Andrée instigated this arrangement also.

After my despair of the preceding days, the present turn of events was quite encouraging. The war went better too. The Germans were defeated in Africa. The hopelessness experienced when they were thought unbeatable was gone. The Allies threatened to land in Italy, and the Russians were steadily pushing the Germans back. Swarms of Allied bombers flew over Brussels often now, causing noisy symphonies of engines and gun fire at night. Eventually, the thousand year "Reich" would collapse. Still, favorable developments were slow in coming, and our inpatient spirits were always racing way ahead with wishful hoping.

At home, I now rivaled my stepfather in the expounding of soon to come Allied triumphs. Out of each successful skirmish, I made a glorious battle, and by the time my stepfather rehashed it, we had a decisive victory for the Allies. My mother listened eagerly, tried to concoct something to eat, and said invariably, "Good God, if it only were over!"

I had to get in the habit of running my errands in the mornings when my landlords would expect me to go to school.

Soon my room was decorated with drawings and posters I had made at the academy. They lessened the impact of the countless, small, wild red roses on the beige wall paper. On a map of Europe, tacked to the wall, I kept track of the location of military fronts with colored pins.

It was a new and blissful experience to sit quietly in my own room where I felt secure, at least until someone slammed a door downstairs. Albert was hard on doors.

At noon, Charles' wife would bring my lunch. (I guess I forgot her first name, because I called her Mme. Caubergh, of course.) The meal, always modest, prepared without meat of fat, was brought with a friendliness that made it always satisfying. Besides, I had enough bread now to keep from being hungry.

Also, I had all the work I wanted. The table stood under the skylight where there was ample light to work by. I could not do much in the evening because there was no electricity in my room. I sat a candle on the table to read by or to make notes in my diary. For the latter, as well as for my papers and photographs, I fashioned a hiding place in the floor. The floor was made of stained wooden planks, polished by use. When I was sure that I was alone in the house, I worked on getting one of the planks loose. That did not take long, and under it I stashed my secrets.

Charles, who came home at seven p.m., got into the habit of calling me downstairs during the evening for a chat. The young couple had neither a radio nor a phonograph to entertain themselves with, nor did they have any books, although I do believe that she read a magazine now and then.

This evening routine annoyed me because I had to watch what I said, and having nothing to say himself, Charles relied on me to entertain him. I tried to bore him by telling him stories about artists, but he insisted that he found everything I said interesting. Sometimes I wondered why his sweet wife, who seemed much better educated than he, had married him. Love, I guessed.

Andrée called on me occasionally. She rattled the bell four times, sprinted upstairs in the manner of a healthy youth, and brightened my day for a few minutes. Soon she desisted from ringing the bell. Her visits became more frequent and longer. She liked to watch me work. Of course, Andrée could not just sit still. While I worked and while she watched, I learned something about her hometown and her family.

She came from a small village (Wayaux), was the oldest of eight children and had a large family. I knew all her siblings well, long before I met them.

Eventually, Andrée began to bring pieces of bread and sometimes even a can of sardines. Sardines were quite a gift, hardly available on the black market. I took these to my mother who was fond of them.

I should mention here, that my relationship with my parents, especially my stepfather, improved greatly after I left home. I visited them whenever I came close to the old neighborhood, or when I had to buy my rations, because grocers only sold food to established customers. One of the problems with this rule was, I didn't know whether or not rations were available when I came to the store.

My stepfather offered to bring my month' ration of potatoes to the 83 streetcar stop at the cemetery gate on a certain date each month. He would get them at the store when they were available. Also, this way I would not have to drag the 40 pounds. (Often, less than half was edible.) His first trip was set on a day early in September (1943) at eight p.m. (At the time, most Belgians still disregarded the curfew. If they were not of military age, and their papers were in order, they were not arrested. Jews, of course, were just as unsafe before 8 p.m. as after, and at home as well as in the street.

Margit lived with the Jacobs then, the professor of sculpture. The Jacobs were friends of the Dirkxs. Despite the fact that Mrs. Jacobs was very fond of Margit, my sister did not want to stay with them, because they and their daughter, who was a University student, were gone all day. Margit was ill at ease, alone in their dark apartment. Also, she found the Jacobs "cold".

My sister's attitude irked me. I felt she should be grateful for being with people who actually loved her and wanted her.

Actually, I did not see Margit then and received information about her only when I visited the Dirkx. Anyway, it had been arranged that she would leave in the near future for a place in the Ardennes. (Details of this arrangement did not become known to me till after the war. The Jacobs' daughter was tutoring the daughter of the chief Rabbi of Belgium (Ullman). Remember that Jews were no longer allowed to go to school. Ullman had also been "the" Rabbi of the Belgian Armed Forces, a position that had afforded him the acquaintance of a number of Belgian officers and dignitaries. Among them was a Colonel Charles Henry. It was this Colonel Henry who placed Margit as a maid to a doctor's family in Rochefort, in the Ardennes.)

I had become accustomed to the loneliness of my room and even found it pleasant at times, in spite of the gravestone makers whose shops lined the streets around the cemetery. Their hammering could be heard all day.

Andrée visited me daily now. She always came at the same time, and soon I was waiting impatiently for the light tapping of her feet on the staircase, the hesitant knock on the door, her smile and her blushing when we shook hands. Talkative as she was, she kept me informed of the latest rumors, and also the details of her daily existence. Her voice was unusually melodious, warm and clear. Her French was exquisite. Most often I worked while she talked. Sometimes, I sat and listened quietly. Candles were expensive, so when night fell we sat in the dark. When Andrée tired of talking, I usually played the mouth-organ. Charles had enough sense not to bother me when I had company.

One evening, after playing songs Andrée had asked for, we sat quietly. She on the chair at the table, I on the bed smoking.

After a while she said, "You know, it's funny, but life is beautiful for me now. All day long I wait for the moment I can come to see you. It feels so good to have a *big brother*. The ones I have at home are all younger than I. The thought that the war may be over, paradoxical as it may seem, bothers me. For then you will surely leave for America and I won't see you any more."

This sudden demonstration of affection, if unexpected, was never the-less touching. It was too dark to see her face.

Did she love me? I was sure she had a crush on Emil.

I asked her to sit next to me. She hesitated, but did come to my side. Our bodies almost touched. I said, "I don't see why the end of the war should prevent us from seeing each other. Even if I should leave for the USA, you could come also if you wanted to."

"One does not take one's sister," she countered. I took her hand into mine which added to my bewilderment, and said, "One takes one's wife?" regretting my words instantly. Why? Andrée was a charming girl, good looking, capable and spirited enough to suit any man! And, had she not saved my life at the risk of her own?

She withdrew her hands: "And Lucie?" My proposal did not seem to have surprised her.

"Lucie?" Lucie had been nowhere in my mind, "You don't think that there was anything between us, do you?"

I felt her warm breath on my cheek, "No, but she loves you."

She continued, her voice gaining pitch and speed, "Lucie admitted it to me, though she does not know for sure."

"Oh?"

"Well, you know, she has a boyfriend who is in Germany now, and they do write to each other."

I admitted that I did not know. Andrée went on, "She just can't make up her mind. She told me so herself."

"What does he do in Germany?" I asked suspiciously.

"He was deported by the Germans to work there."

For a while we sat silently in the dark. I stared at Andrée, a little perplexed by what had been said, although I could feel her presence more than I could see it. Finally, I could not help but ask: "And you, do you love me?"

There was no answer. So it was true? Why was I pleased? It was as if my gladness was something physical rushing through my veins making my heart beat fast. I wanted to take her in my arms and kiss her. Instead, I stammered, "On Sunday I will talk to Lucie, and tell her that should we live through this war, I will make you my wife. That is if you wish. Why don't you answer me?"

"Not now." Her voice trembled, "Talk to Lucie first!"

I wanted to kiss her, but she arose and turned to leave: "Not now, please." At the door she stopped: "Please do not be angry with me if I go. *Au revoir.*." She offered me both hands. I pulled her gently against me and kissed her. She tore herself away and ran. Downstairs the door slammed. I stood in the dark where she left me. Through the open door I could see the staircase window and outside dark trees reaching hopelessly for the distant sky.

I don't know why Charles and his wife moved out. But they did, and I worried about who was going to move in, for I had no doubt that the Cauberghs would rent the two-room flat as quickly as they could. With the young couple went my one warm meal a day, and I had to consider talking to the landlord about running a wire from the basement to the mansard to get electricity for a hot plate.

Andrée, constantly concerned about me, insisted on a sign language to let her know whether I was in or out. I could see the backside of her apartment, where the kitchen was, and she could see the backside of the Caubergh house. Behind it and to each side was a walled-in backyard, then behind the wall was an open field that stretched all the way to the Ave. du Couronnement.

Because I could show myself at the staircase window without much fear of discovery, we could wave to each other in the morning. The neighbors to my left had a shed attached to the inside of their backyard wall. I had been told to be suspicious of them. Their teen-age son seemed to belong to a German-friendly organization. He wore a uniform and whistled German songs. I stayed away from the staircase window if anyone was in their yard.

The signal we agreed on was, when I went out, I put a white flower pot on the window sill. Removed it when I came home.

It was on a Sunday that Lucie, Andrée, Ernst and Margit met with me at the Cinquantenaire cinema. A date set some time ago. It was a lovely day, and we decided to go for a walk.

I can't recall how we communicated about this date. I believe, it was Andrée who made the contacts. It was the first time we met since I moved to the rue des Menusiers.

Soon I discovered some sort of tension between Lucie and Andrée, and for the moment, I could only guess that it was caused by Andrée's refusal to give Lucie my address. Lucie asked me for it before long, and though I told her that I was not at liberty to reveal my where-about, she kept insisting that she should know.

I was relieved when we reached the 'Luna' amusement park where various attractions aroused Lucie's interest and she stopped nagging me.

With Margit she went into a famous seer's tent, and while we waited for their future to be revealed, Andrée reminded me gently of the promise I had given to "break with Lucie". (What was there to break? I had never even been on a date with her!)

When the girls returned from the seer, they seemed to be quite impressed with her work. Having never been to one, I decided to go myself. The seer was an imposing Gypsy in her sixties. Seated on a cushion in an appropriate atmosphere of colorful silken drapes, she motioned me to the cushion facing her. Then after looking into my eyes for a few moments, she studied my hands with utmost seriousness.

"These times are difficult for you," she said in a deep sonorous voice, "But, do not despair. No harm will come to you. After the war, you will go to a far away country. There you will make your place quickly and know fame. You will take for your wife a blonde and have seven children."

The weather had changed. We decided to go to a cinema to avoid the threatening rain. Actually, I would have preferred to go to a park where German raids were far less common than at the movies. But I was not alone in the decision. Anyway, we got to see some dumb show in which some simpleton tried to hang himself. At least this is all I could recall later, because we had not been watching the show for long, when Lucie, who sat at my left, put her head on my shoulder and began to sob. Shocked, I thought for a moment that some twist in the drama we were watching had triggered this display of emotion. But, when I realized that this was not the case, I bad her to come to the smoking room with me. One of the hat check girls eyed us curiously and whispered to the other to make sure she would not miss "*this*".

On one of the plush, red upholstered seats, embarrassed and feeling somewhat ridiculous, I tried to calm Lucie and implored her to tell me what was bothering her so. She kept shaking her head and refused to talk.

Finally, my patience exhausted, I told her harshly to stop acting like a child and to return with me to our seats. She obeyed, and under the gleeful eyes of the hat check girls we went back to our seats to see more of the suicidal maniac.

After the show, we accompanied Margit to her streetcar. She was to leave shortly for a stay at a girls pension at Rod St. Genese and before leaving for the Ardennes.

Andrée, who kept giving me significant glances, on one occasion, when we were beyond the reach of the ears of the others, whispered that her employers were out of town. I should stop at her place before going home.

Then Ernst and Andrée left together.

Mute and red-eyed Lucie walked next to me. Remembering my promise to Andrée, I cleared my throat several times to say something, but said nothing since I did not know what to say. Finally, Lucie, breaking out in tears once again, began to talk: "I guess it's finished between us. Oh poor me. I have no luck!" She blew her nose noisily, while I looked nervously about us.

It was getting to be late in the afternoon and the boulevard was almost deserted. Feeling that I had to say something, I summoned my courage and expressed surprise at Lucie's outburst, suggesting, at an attempt to joke, people seeing us might believe we were involved in some heart-rending drama.

Speaking softly, I forced Lucie to diminish her crying to a whimper so she could hear me, and told her that surely she would yet encounter the man of her dreams, even though I was not he. It would be better to have all finished between us, just as she had said herself.

"Ah, the seer was right!" Lucie cried, "I have to lose you! You betrayed me!"

Believe me, I was totally baffled. My "affaire" with Lucie existed apparently in her as well as in Andrée's imagination.

Again, I implored her to use some self-control, and she actually tried. Leaning heavily against me, she began to tell me her story. It was simple and sad enough. Mostly it was about her first "fiancé" who, it seemed, died in France. While talking she regained her composure, and by the time she had finished pouring out her poor little heart, she was her normal self. Much to my relief, I must say. At the end she reiterated her definite lack of luck with men. (I bet she was not a day over seventeen years old.)

Suddenly, she decided to part from me. She gave me a small trembling smile and vanished in the dark. Her little smile bothered me more than her hour-long crying. (I saw Lucie once more shortly after the war. She carried a baby in her arms and walked at the side of a handsome young man, her size and her age. We were in a large crowd, in a park, and I don't believe she saw me.)

Saddened, and feeling like a heel, I went to see Andrée. To get into her apartment building, I just rang her bell twice. The inner door was activated by remote control from the apartment. One could do all this without attracting the attention of the concierge.

Her reception was ice cold. I wanted to kiss her cheek, as I was now in the habit of doing, but she moved away. Puzzled, I followed her in the living room where the dog, who had treated me like a friend before, (he had been to my place several times,) growled at me. Planting herself at a window, Andrée turned an angry back to me.

Annoyed and confused, I apologized for being late, and told her of my "breaking up" with Lucie. This morsel of news did wonders for her mood. She suddenly brightened and insisted on preparing food for me. French fries and a green salad.

Margit was at Rod St. Genese at a girls "pension". I mentioned her departure for this place before, but should add here, that the "pension" was used by some brave people, unknown to me to this day, to hide Jewish girls in the midst of other guests. Of course, at the time, I did not know where she was, only that she was well.

In the meantime, efforts to find a hiding place for my mother were all in vain because she spoke neither Flemish not French!

For September the weather was unusually pleasant and mild. This evening my stepfather was to bring my potatoes. I waited for him at the 83 streetcar terminal at the cemetery gate. The appointed time came and went. The dark streets were practically deserted. Very rarely did any German come to this area. Yet, I was uncomfortable standing at the terminal from where there was no dashing to any hiding. Also, of course, I was worried. My stepfather had his faults, but he was most reliable and most punctual.

While I was waiting, some fighter planes roared over the roof tops. In the center of the square (Meudon) stood the monument hewn of rock of a large woman in a posture of mourning.

Streetcars came at greater intervals. They were so well blacked out, one could hear them long before one could see them. Fragments of music, rays of light escaped from the two cafés on the square when someone entered or left.

My stepfather did not come, and eventually, I returned to my room. In vain did I contemplate various reason that could have kept him from our appointment. It just was not like him. I had a terrible feeling that something had happened.

For a while I thought of going to the rue de Moulin to check. What could my appearance save if the Germans had been there? I decided to wait till morning and steel myself for the worst. Needless to say, I did not get much rest that night, also reproached myself for not going home right away. Then, as soon as the streetcars were running, I went.

I found my mother trembling, her face swollen from crying. I took her in my arms, and eventually I learned what had happened. My stepfather had carried coal all day long. Then he had gone to the public bath, and from there he did not return home. Had he been in an accident, the police or a hospital would have notified mother by now.

It was clear that my stepfather had been apprehended by the Germans. I could not help but feel sorry that our relationship had not been a better one.

After mother became calmer, I begged her to go to Litschi for a while, and eventually she did. Somewhat relieved, I left. After all, my stepfather had identification on him, and the Germans were known to follow up arrests with visits to their victim's home.

Emil was visiting relatives in Luxembourg. He had been my greatest moral support and I missed him much. He came to see me after his return on the day I was installing a wire from the basement to my mansard. I dropped what I was doing at once to tell him all that had happened while he had been gone.

Not all that sure about my engagement to Andrée yet, I had, however, bought a blue-stoned silver ring for her which I showed Emil. He found this very funny and laughed disbelievingly. When he realized I was serious, he became suddenly very somber and took off abruptly, leaving me bewildered to say the least. Trying to explain his unusual behavior, I could only find one plausible answer: Emil loved Andrée! Good Lord, what next!?

The following day, towards the end of a rainy afternoon, Emil returned. Andrée who had stopped by to say hello was just leaving.

The two met on the staircase and he greeted her warmly. He ignored my welcome, pushed his hat back and sat grimly on a chair. It seemed to me that much had to be said, but he interrupted me as soon as I began to talk.

"Put your coat on and come with me!" he hissed.

All I managed to say was "Oh". He did not give me a chance to say anything else. "Are you coming, or are you yellow?" he cried. He had been staring at the floor, but just then he lifted his face and the fury I noticed was frightening. Then his stare shifted to some obscure spot on the wall. I offered him a cigarette which he ignored, lit one for myself and sat down. Trying to appear calm, I thought, might calm him. But the opposite happened. He seemed to get madder, if that was possible. Had I not known him, I could have sworn I was face to face with some maniac.

"You seem to be very nervous." I tried. His face twitched convulsively: "Are you coming or not?" He thundered.

What was the matter with him? How did he get into this state of mind? What had I done? "Could you explain what this is all about?"

"What? You rat! Explanations?" he screamed. Standing in front of me, he waved his fists about my face: "All right, if you don't want to come with me, we can have it out here." He threw his hat on the floor, tore his jacket off and rolled his sleeves up.

So, that was what he wanted: A fist fight! All of a sudden more brawn than brains. I certainly had not expected this from Emil. Slightly nauseated I tried to think of something, but there was no time. Yet, the consequences of a fight in this place, which had served as my haven, was unthinkable.

"Alright," I said, " I will go with you."

Fuming, he slipped his jacket on, took a piece of bread from his pocket and hungrily chewed, while I donned my overcoat hoping that on the way to where ever he was taking me, he would come to his senses. After all, he was my best friend and I could not imagine any fight between us. In the past, we had been in the habit of discussing everything with some pride for our attempt at logic. This sudden hysterical outburst did not make sense. I had assumed that we had no secrets from each other. Yet, he had never told me of any romantic inclinations he harbored for Andrée. He must love her, I thought. What else?

At his directions we took the streetcar 39 to Stockel. Emil planted himself in a corner of the platform and kept his back turned to me.

Getting off at the end of the line, we were in the country where houses were separated by large fields and gardens. The rain had stopped. Staying ten yards ahead of me, Emil led the way. Occasionally I would lose him from sight because of numerous tall bushes that grew along the narrow, winding path we had taken. The sky was dark and wild. Everybody else seemed to have decided that this was a good day to stay indoors. There was not a soul in sight. Tall, leafless trees stood here and there in unplanned fashion. One would have hardly believed oneself near a metropolis.

I was annoyed and distressed, rather than angry, baffled more than anything else, and I realized my friend had a great advantage over me, since he apparently hated me. And, I began to worry about Emil's intentions. After all, he seemed to be quite out of his mind. If I failed to return home, one would simply assume that the Germans got me.

Arrived into some deepening of the terrain, Emil halted, threw his jacket off and proceeded to roll up his sleeves. The thing we had always laughed about had apparently happened: A woman had come between us.

"Take off your coat!" He ordered.

"I would not think of it," I retorted, " I am not going to catch cold because of you."

"Ahh, you think this is funny!" he screamed.

My efforts at being calm seemed to do nothing to improve the situation.

"I am not trying to be funny. I just can't believe that you went nuts."

This did not help either. Furiously, he grabbed me and shook me, staring right by me with rolling eyes, as if anxious to avoid mine.

There was something theatrical about this. His fury did not seem quite genuine. Actually, he could have been knocked down easily as he stood there completely unprotected his hands gripping my coat. But no matter what, I could not hit him, although I wondered whether or not he wanted me to, as he hurled insults at me.

Suddenly he tired. He raised his hand to hit me, but changed his mind. He yet threatened to spit in my face, but didn't, and then let go of me as if to pause for air.

It did not come to a fight. His insults subsided and were replaced by bitter reproaches. I had taken his girl from him! I should not try to deny it. I had been sneaky, taking Andrée while he was gone to visit a dying grandfather! I should make an effort to understand his shock, since incidentally, he had thought me his best friend. Or, do I not remember that he kissed Andrée right in front of me? He recalled a Sunday outing, at the end of which he had kissed Andrée on her cheek. I protested that I had no memory of any such act of affection, that I must not have noticed or paid much attention. Ignoring me, he kept denouncing me.

Had I realized that Emil had an affection for the girl, I would not have even flirted with her. I tried to tell him that, but he did not let me say a word. Instead, he talked and talked. Occasionally, he halted his tirades to take a breath, but not long enough to let me get a word in.

He talked of the difficulties our friendship had caused him, how it had ruined his relationship with his family. The whole thing was kind of pitiful, and eventually I began to cry. This started him crying too, and soon we embraced each other.

(Thinking about the problems I had at that time, my romantic involvement with Lucie and Andrée, I now assume that these were caused primarily by a culture chasm between my Jewish-Austrian background and the Belgians'. I grew up with a great deal of outspokenness between peers, while Belgians seemed to take a lot of unsaid things for granted. Just dating a girl, or kissing a girl on the cheek was by no means a sign of a deep commitment where I came from. But then, on the other hand, I had no experience dating in any kind of culture, including my own.)

On the way home, I suggested to Emil that I would explain everything to Andrée, and that we should let her decide, but he would not have it. He assured me that he had forgiven me, and that we should consider this occurrence a test of our friendship. But, I should be patient for I would not see him soon, not before two month or so, anyway.

Now I wondered if there was not more to this disruption of our friendship than my entanglement with Andrée.

I did see her later that evening and told her nothing.

The flat under me was rented to a woman with a baby. She was probably in her mid-twenties, rather flabby with dark, curly, but flat hair, and eyes in her round, flat face that looked away from each other. Her man was supposedly in Africa.

From the very beginning she caused me unpleasantness. In no time, the house was permeated with the odors of dirty diapers, but she insisted that the staircase window be kept closed at all time. I had kept it open for fresh air, but also because I considered it a possible escape-option in case of a visit by the Gestapo. Conceivably I could drop from the window to a tin roof below, from there into the backyard, then cross the backyard to its back wall, get over it into the field behind the house.

Of course, I didn't mention this to my new neighbor. I just argued for fresh air and a relief from the diaper odors. But she was pigheaded about keeping the window shut, and finally she hinted that I might be Jewish because Jews were known to suffer from a belligerent attitude. I acted quite insulted, but she had won her argument. I realized that I had to live in peace with her. Fortunately, she and the baby were gone from 8 to 5.

I had electricity now and a hot plate which I did not dare use often because electricity was rationed according to prewar consumption.

My skylight was blacked out with photographs I had left from my last job for Polak. When I went to deliver them, I found that Polak had been arrested by the Gestapo. The studio had a seal on its door.

My engagement to Andrée was official now. I had given her the ring. As I put it on her finger, the blue stone fell out.

It was not the first time air-raid sirens wailed their mournful tune. The morning was still young. The sun hung very low in a superb, cloudless sky. The ack-ack guns, some apparently close-by, had begun their sharp, dry, thunderclap-like firing, punctuating the steadily growing sound of approaching planes. This was not unusual either. But never had they flown over the city at this time of the day, nor at as low an altitude.

I climbed on my table, stuck my head outside the skylight and scanned the sky with my small illegal opera glasses. Where the ack-ack puffs were densest, I saw formations of flying fortresses. My heart jumped with joy, despite the threatening attitude of the bombers, I did not consider leaving the window. Besides, there were no military targets in our immediate neighborhood. People had run into the street or hung like grapes from windows pointing to the sky. The bombers, leaving long trails of steam behind, circled the city. Obviously this time the target was in Brussels. The barking of the guns diminished considerably as their crews headed for shelters.

Then there was this roar, like an express train rushing through a tunnel. People in the street dispersed. Some pressed themselves into entryways or against walls. Windowpanes rattled softly. The top of my head itched. Suddenly, on the horizon in the direction of the airfield in Evère, pillars of red smoke popped up into the sky. Faintly, air pressure hit me in waves. Sand seemed to drizzle behind my wallpaper. One gun kept on firing furiously and vainly while the bombers roared overhead.

I went downstairs where I found Hortense, the landlady, in her kitchen peeling potatoes. Mirsa, the dog, had retreated under a chair, and from there emitted hostile growls. Hortense said "Booom" and laughed heartily.

She cut her laugh neatly in half, leaving her mouth hang open. Mirsa's growl changed abruptly into a high-pitched wail. More bombs! These were coming down not very far from us. I stepped in a door frame, which was supposed to offer some protection from falling walls, and Hortense regained enough control over her lower lip to utter: "Oi yoi yoi." Then the house shook briefly, rattled, and already my landlady laughed again.

I rushed upstairs to take a look. From the staircase window I saw an enormous black cloud over the area where the Barracks of Etterbeek were, the place that had seen me interned during the first three days of the war. Since then, the Germans had changed it into a vast motor pool.

More bombs fell, but much further away.

Then suddenly there was a new sound. A shrill mechanical scream wrapped about a deep wailing moan. People who had been at a window staring, disappeared in their houses.

No doubt a plane was falling, maybe even full of bombs yet. Excited, I tried to see the stricken bomber, but could not find it. The roar increased in nerve-shattering fashion. It was as if the bomber was heading for me. Then a crash and an explosion.

There was no indication where the plane had fallen; no new smoke. But, there were two white, shiny, earthbound parachutes.

The attack was over. The planes departed. Despite the ringing ambulance bells all seemed quiet now. Slowly dust and smoke dissipated. Sirens put an official end to the alert. Then, as if to assure everybody all was under control, German control, Nazi fighter planes of the latest vintage roared over the city.

Around the airport, in Evère, quiet a few homes had been destroyed. When Ernst, Andrée and I got there in the early evening, ruins were still smoldering. People, blackened by smoke and dust, wandered around, some in a state of shock, calling names of people apparently missing. Hands attempted to remove rubble under which victims were believed buried. Desperate, bleeding, foolish hands tearing in vain at the debris where there was not enough official help. A handful of uniformed "*Defense Passive*" people worked feverishly in an effort to reach moans that came from a basement under a pile of rubble. Their efforts were frustratingly slow, still admirable, considering that some of the bombs dropped were time-bombs designed to explode later.

There was an urgency to reach those trapped in basements. They had survived the bombs, but now they had to survive gas and water seeping into buried shelters from broken pipes. A putrid stench hung over the area. But, not a German was to be seen.

During the night some bombs exploded. I don't know if they were time bombs, or duds set off accidentally by rescue workers.

Walter, who with his mother Poldi was our neighbor in the rue de Moulin, and who worked at the airport, escaped the bombing unharmed. He did need a few days to recuperate from the experience, but was anxious to tell me about it, when I visited my mother a few days later.(Mother had returned to the apartment in the rue de Moulin after a brief stay with Lintschi.)

"First," Walter said, "there was the alert. We are used to those because we get them often enough, more so than the city, and always earlier.

Routinely we go to the shelters. It gives us a break, an opportunity for an extra cigarette. But this time, things were different. No sooner was the alert given when the first bombs hit. That was some circus! We knew right away, by the way the planes came in that this time they meant business. "Man did we run! I am still covered with bruises I got when we pushed for the shelters.

As we ran, bombs exploded around us. Fragments whistled through the air. A friend who ran next to me was hit and fell. He was covered with blood. One glance and I knew he was dead. Others were trampled to death before we reach the shelters. What a circus!"

Walter paused and shook his head nervously. His eyes were fixed at a distance where he seemed to relive the panic. "You should have seen the Germans. One yelled, 'Attention! Ready to fire! Battery fire!' But the guns and the machine-guns on the roofs of the buildings out there never got a shot off. No sooner had that monkey given his orders, bombs exploded. He and his crew dropped everything and ran for dear life. Head over heels they ran, I tell you.

"Over ninety bombs fell. The carefully camouflaged hangars were all demolished. From the air they looked like private homes. Well, they are gone. So are the planes that were inside. Ah, what a circus, I tell you!"

The barracks of Etterbeek had also been heavily bombed. I believe, much of the population was jubilant about the strikes, but the methods the Allies used to get at the Germans in allied territory was shocking. Instead of pinpointing targets, they leveled entire areas in which they were located. This was a shame that fed the German propaganda mills. Especially, since rumors had it that manufacturing plants that could claim American ownership were never bombed, even when they produced war materials.

Anyway, what was considered by some a comical footnote to the bombing, was that SS. troops had been practicing the goose-step to the beat of a band, on the maneuver field in front of the Etterbeek barracks, when they were hit by bombs. The drummer, it was said, was seen running, covered with blood, towards the street, while holding his head with his hands, apparently unaware of his torn drum which kept clinging to him.

A streetcar (98) got a direct hit. It was crowded with school children. A woman was seen running from it. She kept tripping over her intestines until she fell not to rise again. A young female ticket collector had been standing at the side of the streetcar. Her remains had to be scraped off a wall with a spoon. The hospital of Etterbeek and a cemetery were also bombed.

A woman's body was found without its head which was found a few days later on the roof of a nearby dwelling. And so on... The city was foul with odors, changing with the wind direction. Perhaps some of these mishaps were unavoidable, but there was no doubt that most people felt they were unnecessary.

Because the Dirkxs lived not very far from the Schaerbeek railway depot, I hurried to see if they were all right. Although no bombs had fallen close to their home, I found them in a very somber mood. Upon my worried inquiry, I learned that Emil was in a hospital. Three days earlier, he had gone with his brother to Stockel to climb trees. From the top of one, he had fallen some fifteen meters, had broken his spine, several ribs, and had suffered internal injuries. Worse, he had not yet regained consciousness.

The fact is, I really did not get used to almost constant bad news. It accumulates in the soul and erodes one's zest for life. That evening I had to wait a long time for a streetcar. Because of the bombing it had been rerouted. Like myself, the people around me seemed quite depressed. No one seemed to care for conversation. Instead we watched the sun set. It sets quite fast in September. Before it left us, it put the sky aflame.

I visited my mother quite regularly at that time. It was on one of these visits, shortly after the bombing, that I found her in tears. She had just received a letter from my stepfather. His last letter. It was written in pencil on a scrap of paper. On its back, the finder was implored to deliver the message. An unknown person who had found the piece of paper had done so. And, we learned that my stepfather was in a transport of some 2000 Jews and some Gypsies. They had been underway one day when the note was written. It spoke of men, women and children being stuffed in freight cars at the rate of fifty per car.

(Freight cars were much smaller than now. On the sides of the cars small openings provided air.) My stepfather ended his letter: "We have been told that we are being shipped to Holland, but who knows what will become of us. May God save you."

Andrée was given a few days off to visit her family in Wayaux. And, although we wrote to each other, I was quite lonely while she was gone. (The mail being censured, we had to be very careful about what we wrote.)

In the meantime, I learned that my landlord's brother was a Nazi who had joined the (Belgian) SS. When he came to visit the landlord, I did not know this and thought the Nazis had come for me.

I had just fallen asleep, when the door being slammed downstairs startled me. Mirsa was having a case of hysterics. Her protest was answered with a German curse. A moment later the kitchen door slammed, and I was not even dressed yet. It seems that there was only one man. Usually, the Nazis came in bunches of six. I had to decide whether or not I would prefer to jump out the staircase window or climb through the skylight onto the roof. While I was hesitating, all had become quiet downstairs, and I did not flee.

Later I learned that the son of one of the landlord's friends was also an SS. At first this disturbed me greatly. But, the Cauberghs cussed the Germans continually, never asked me personal questions, and eventually I believed that my landlord kept me in his house as some sort of insurance against an Allied victory. Then, if his Nazi relationships were to be held against him, he could claim with some pride, that he had in fact hidden a Jew from the Nazis.

The Cauberghs were hard working people, and open-faced enough for me not to fear them. Had they been Nazis, they could have gotten good, rewarding employment instead of the menial jobs they had. To supplement their meager earnings they did a little black-marketing. This was all right with me. Everybody had to buy on the black market. There were many things one could not obtain otherwise. I believe that only those who worked for the Germans could possibly survive on the rations they received.

As it was, I did not have far to go to buy food when I could afford it. Hortense told me one day, with a certain dignity, that her husband worked at the Ministry of Social Welfare. Her son, little Albert, was seized with hysterics and cried: "Sure enough! Dad scrubs the floors there!"

There was a phone booth near the cemetery gate from where I phoned Dirkx often to inquire about Emil. He had regained consciousness and was out of danger, although it was not certain he would walk again. An operation was needed to repair his spine. Some bone from his leg was to be inserted in his back. Emil's family had engaged the famous surgeon Dr. Marteaux. (After the war, in the mid 40's, the same doctor was to become Prime Minister of Belgium.)

I felt much better after Andrée returned from her vacation. Just to know her around relieved my anxiety and my tensions. Her father was to come to Brussels soon for a visit.

Apparently, he intended to look me over. One could hardly blame him, especially since his daughter risked her life by her relationship with me.

As long as I am on subject of visiting, I should mention that cousin Ernst visited me about once a month on a Sunday. On that day, the youngsters at the home where he was staying were allowed to go out.

I don't know how many Jews were there besides Ernst, if any. At the moment, Ernst thought he could obtain a false ID for me for only 350 francs. (Andrée knew how to get in touch with Ernst by phone. I did not want to know.)

Andrée's father was a small and friendly man, in whose face life had cut deep furrows. He was as shy as I was about meeting people, and after shaking hands we both soon stood there with apparently nothing more to say. Finally, I stammered something about being engaged to Andrée, and that I was happy to meet him, especially since this gave me the opportunity to ask for her hand.

The good man shrugged his shoulders and coughed. Andrée threw herself around his neck and pleaded, "You want to say yes, daddy, don't you?"

Her father shrugged again, this time smiling. He did not say yes, he did not say no, but he did ask me to come to Wayaux for a visit soon.

I now ate dinner with the Cauberghs...for a reasonable price, of course. There was no meat or fat in the food, except on Sunday, mostly a meal consisted of potatoes, rutabaga or cabbage and a slice of "bread". Hortense was not much of a cook. Her favored ingredient was vinegar. Yet, I was glad to share meals with them. I always disliked eating alone, and to sit down with friendly people at a table was a treat.

The surgery on Emil was successful. His torso in a plaster cast, he was flat on his back, and was to stay so in the hospital for an undetermined length of time. The financial strain caused by his mishap all but ruined his family. I relied on Dirkx for news concerning my friend, because believing myself unwelcome, I lacked the courage to go and visit him. When I visited my mother, I kept her informed of Emil's progress.

On one of my visits to mother, I brought Andrée to introduce them. They liked each other at once. To my astonishment, they were quite emotional about meeting. Mother almost broke out in tears. They even talked a great deal, mother in German, Andrée in French, and though they did not understand one word of what they were saying to each other, they were quite satisfied with their conversations!

To my relief, mother never asked about Andrée's religion. I suppose the question was superfluous to her.

About that time, Ernst brought the false ID. he had promised me. To my great disappointment it was so poorly made, any child could have seen it was phony. I destroyed it at once. A good ID was invaluable, a poor one was suicide.

It was on a Sunday, soon thereafter, that Andrée took me to meet her aunt (Anne Castin) who owned a café in a very quiet street in Ixelles, a district in Brussels. Her husband had been arrested by the Germans when they raided his café and was now in a concentration camp. No one knew where.

Aunt Anne, in her mid-forties, as well as her dog were corpulent and friendly. When we got there, they both were looking for their cat.

We liked each other on sight, and became acquainted sipping "Spacibon", an effervescent soft drink, while enjoying the warmth radiating from a large stove in the center of the café. The place was unvisited at the time, and we learned that of the few customers that were left most were German soldiers.

With Christmas and New year coming, I was very busy. Often I worked till late at night until exhausted, glad that another day had gone by.

I did not bother to undress anymore. First of all, it was getting very cold, and besides I did not want to have to dress should the Germans come for me.

In the morning, I slept late. This had its advantage since I did not eat breakfast. It was about noon when I began to work, and I could tell myself that another day was already half over.

Because the Cauberghs seemed not to care who I was or what I was doing, I had given up the pretense of going to school in the morning. The woman in the apartment under me, could always think that I left after she did. I made it a point to avoid her, but she did not have to be encountered to be a nuisance. She made it a habit to knock on her ceiling with a stick or a broom, when I had a late visit by Andrée, to encourage us to silence.

During the night peculiar noises came from the house next to us. I was unable to tell whether the noise came from the house on the left, or from the one on the right. But, there was no doubt that someone was running some sort of machine. Before they did, some furniture was moved about.

My watch was unreliable. It worked according to weather conditions. Eventually, I learned to set my watch by a rat which came with uncanny punctuality at two a.m. through the eaves-trough that ran trough my room alongside one wall. The drain let to the roof near my skylight, and I began to close it at night.

Andrée, very fond of her family, often talked about it. She was the oldest of five or six? And, now I was going to meet them all. The trip to Wayaux would be my first to the country. It certainly would provide me with a welcomed change of scenery. True, to travel was risky because the Germans raided trains; and also the Allies bombed them frequently now. But all this would not be able to prevent me from going. After all, to sit fearfully in my room and listen apprehensively to any unusual noise was no picnic either. Also, Andrée had told me, that once in the country, I would find dangers vastly diminished and would be able to relax.

Finally, the much expected day came. When our train left the Gare du Midi, early in the afternoon, it was one and one half hours late.

Although an "express", it turned out to be slower than a Brussel' streetcar.

People were packed into the train like the proverbial sardines. There was no chance of sitting down. All available seats were taken by the elderly. Neither water nor toilet facilities were available. Despite of all this, the air seemed fresher to me, the panorama rolling by us so slowly seemed wonderful. The excitement of the adventure was enhanced by the perfumed presence of Andrée, tightly pressed against me.

Whenever there was an air-raid alert the train came to a halt.

We had been standing still for some time when night fell. Now in the dark, we could see the glows of gunfire and tracers at the distant horizon. The rumbling that went with all of this was very much like that of a far away thunder storm.

Then there was a slight commotion when bombers could be heard approaching, and railway personnel hastened towards the train's steam engine to put its fire out. The tiny, blacked-out lights inside the cars were turned out also.

We stood quietly in the darkness which was punctuated by glowing red dots of numerous cigarettes. Whoever spoke, whispered as if unwilling to disturb fellow travelers listening intently to the din of war.

Groups of bombers passed over us for a long time. The drone of their engines was beautiful music to me. We were not alone in this world. These men in their planes were our friends and they were close to us now.

What was their objective? Cologne had been their favorite target of late. Rome had been taken by the Allies not long ago. The Russians were pushing the Germans relentlessly. Still, they were all so far away from us.

Andrée and I had our arms around each other. She was whispering in my ear that she loved me.

Finally, the planes were gone. I listened yearningly to their fading roar. It took some time before the train was in motion once more. But then, we did not get very far. In a small railway station we halted again. This time for good. A lantern-swinging station master walked along the train shouting everybody off. It seemed the tracks ahead as well as the depot at Charleroi had been damaged. Some people cursed, but most were resigned to the situation. Soon we found ourselves in a small, blacked-out town. Fortunately, Andrée knew where we were.

A "Vicinal", a streetcar that connects towns and villages came through here from Charleroi. It would take us to Wayaux.

In a barren café, still open despite the advanced hour, we drank a glass of wine, the only available refreshment. The place was quickly crowded with people, off the train, having the same idea.

At the Vicinal stop, we found several farmers with sacks of potatoes and suitcases probably filled with items for the black market. The streetcar-like vehicle arrived before long. It was the last of the day as the blue tail light indicated. After a bit of pushing, we got on the terribly crowded conveyance.

Then we rolled through the night, through blacked-out country, occasionally through a sleeping town or village.

Andrée knew where to get off. As the last glimmer of light from the Vicinal faded with the clamor of its steel wheels, we were at the road that led to Wayaux, the "Chemin de Wayaux." There was a twenty minutes walk ahead of us, and hand in hand we walked into the night. A narrow path, a shortcut, led over a barren field before we rejoined the road, now lined with poplar trees, that led to our destination. The path had been invisible in the dark, and had it not been for my small flashlight, which I switched on and off, we could not have gone through the field.

Along a brick wall we walked towards the center of the village, a small square in front of a modest old brick church.

Barely visible in the dark were some people coming towards us: Andrée's mother and her sisters Valentine and Louise. Mrs. Castin, Andrée's mother, from whom Andrée got her melodious voice, told us after a warm greeting, that they had been waiting for us for hours, and that they had finally decided to go and see if we had arrived on the last Vicinal.

As we walked to their home, the mother told me that she was very happy to finally meet me, and expressed hope that I would enjoy my visit with them, even though they were poor and lived in modest circumstances. Moved by the woman's humbleness, I assured her that I was grateful and happy to be their guest and hoped that they would find me a pleasant visitor.

Coming around a corner, we entered a small garden in front of a small white house. A dog erupted into ferocious barking. Alerted by the pooch, someone opened the front door for us.

I finally was at Andrée's home. We stood in the kitchen surrounded by children staring at me with popping eyes, while I squinted momentarily in the bright light. Papa Castin sat by the stove smoking a pipe. The dog, a medium sized mongrel, happily whining now, jumped excitedly about, but took time out to sniff me curiously while I was being introduced.

Besides Valentine and Louise, there was Aimé, Joseph and Desiré, and a baby (Monique) that slept through all the commotion. Each child stepped up and hugged and kissed me. I could not remember a more affectionate greeting, and my heart belonged to all of them at once.

Mrs. Castin was dark-haired, dark-eyed, almost slender and a little taller than her husband. The shape of her mid-section betrayed that she was hoping for another offspring yet. She felt her hair, in the manner of a woman who believes herself observed, remarked that we must be famished, began to fuss over some pots on the stove and set the table which stood in the center of the kitchen. With the eager help of the children we disposed of our overcoats and our overnight suitcases. Then I handed out some small gifts which caused some oh's and ah's on the part of the children and some brow wrinkling on the part of their papa.

In addition to the dog, there was also a cat and a number of birds in a large bird cage covered for the night. To my joy, I also discovered a radio and hoped that meant I would be able to listen to the BBC.

It was almost midnight when we sat down to eat. Mrs. Castin was a marvelous cook, and I don't just say this because I was starving. The meal consisted of a bean soup, vegetables, a green salad and bread. It had been a long time since I had eaten so well and to my heart's content.

After that the children had to be put to bed, and like most children they resisted the inevitable end of their day.

Strangely, I felt absolutely safe that night, as if there were no Germans.

I chatted happily with my hosts. Well, almost happily, for occasionally my thoughts turned to my poor mother who was probably fretting about me.

By the time we retired, it was rather late. I had known that there was no bed for me, that I would have to sleep on a wooden bench. For my greater comfort it was put near the stove and a blanket was placed on it. Chairs on each side were to make it less likely for me to fall off.

I would have to sleep on my back anyway, for should I turn, I would surely land on the floor.

After I was alone and the lights were out, the stove lent a reddish glow to the room. The dog settled near the door, the children stopped their esoteric doings upstairs. The quiet night was only disturbed by the buzzing of a fly.

Andrée's vacation was over but her parents refused to let us return to Brussels. Having learned the circumstances in which I lived, they wanted to hide me. For me that was out of the question. I could not expose these kind people to the dreadful consequences their generosity may bring them. To be a visitor was one thing, to live there would be another. Or was it?

Anyway, Andrée dispatched a letter to her employers, who did not know I was with her, with the classic excuse of a temporary illness and the promise to get back to them as soon as she was feeling better.

In the meantime, I had been walked around the village and had met friends of the family, including Andrée's former teacher. Of course, I masqueraded under a false identity. My French was good enough now to have the people believe that I was Flemish rather than a foreigner, and I claimed being a native of Antwerp, a city I hardly knew; but then neither did the local citizens.

Aimé, who was 14, with the seriousness of an adult, took me into his confidence, showed me the countryside and the intricacies of catching birds. It seemed that most people in the village supplemented their diet with certain field birds. They set traps, baited them, then hid from view. When there were enough birds in the trap, a string was pulled and the nets would flip rapidly over the birds. These in their panic became irrevocably enmeshed in the fine net. Thus incapacitated they became easy picking for the bird catchers.

Some birds were freed, either because they were valuable to the farmers, or not edible. Others were killed quickly by a thumb pushed into their stomach and put into waiting gunny sacks.

Mr. Castin brought the birds he caught home alive and kept them in a cage until they were to be eaten. He also sold some of his take. Because they were rather inexpensive, I delighted in buying some and setting them free, hoping that they had learned their lesson. Papa Castin thought that my charitable action was quite foolish, because the birds would be caught again, and soon he refused to sell me any more.

Aimé was very mature for his age. He had large, intelligent eyes through which he peered perhaps a little too seriously at the world. Like his siblings he was rather small and of a yellowish complexion. This puzzled me since they all seemed to eat well and spent much time outdoors. Andrée and Valentine were the exception as far as complexion was concerned.

Aimé worked occasionally at odd jobs in order to help at home. Not to be outdone by his elders, he operated a miniature bird trap in the family vegetable garden.

Valentine, who worked at a factory in Charleroi, arose reluctantly with her mother at five a.m. Getting up that early was one of Valentine's problems. Another was her boyfriend who went unapproved by her parents.

"I am too young," she sighed.

She did show me a photo of her friend, a pleasant enough looking fellow, though he was much thinner and taller than Valentine.

At home, Valentine enjoyed picking a fight with anyone when she was in a certain mood. Usually it was about someone using one of her belongings.

Rarely would she let herself be carried away into some dispute when papa was there. When she did, papa would cough or empty his pipe by knocking it against the stove to remind her of his presence and of her manners. This was also a good time for her mother to ask her for help with some domestic chore. Valentine was very reluctant to do any work at home considering that she worked at a factory. She claimed that she needed her free time to rest and to work on her appearance.

Twelve year old Joseph didn't like school. If at times, he was unruly or even nasty, it was to cover his sensitive nature. He was easily offended and brought to tears by older boys, including his brother Aimé who delighted in teasing him.

One day, as Joseph and I were walking in the garden, a woman walked by eyeing me curiously while exchanging greetings with us. Joseph spit out the grass blade he had been chewing, and told me with great seriousness that I should fear "that one." My assurance that I had nothing to fear were received by the boy with a knowing smile and a meaningful gesture with his hand. "I am not an imbecile," he said quietly, " I know what I am talking about. This old biddy has the fixed idea that Andrée is to marry her nephew. Andrée does not care for him," he added promptly before I had a chance to ask.

"The old bag is our neighbor, and what's more, she has a very big mouth."

Early the next morning, while I was shaving near the kitchen window, I had reason to recall this conversation. On the little pathway, which wound towards the house, appeared three gendarmes. It did little for my heartbeat to note that they were headed straight for the house. There was neither a back door nor a back window and I felt trapped. Just as these servants of the law reached the garden, they turned to their left and soon disappeared from sight. Behind me, the unsuspecting Castins continued with... whatever it was. I replaced the dried lather on my face and continued to shave.

This incident increased my uneasiness about staying in Wayaux. My presence in the village was known to all its inhabitants now. Many dropped by to say hello under all kinds of pretexts, to look me over with childlike but shameless curiosity.

Mr. Castin, very much amused, claimed that the villagers were all first rate patriots, nosy perhaps, but surely harmless. I, however, considered papa's confidence in his neighbors somewhat reckless and was determined to leave as soon as possible for the sake of the Castins as well as mine. But, before we could return to Brussels, we had to visit some of Andrée's relatives in Jumet and in Charleroi. Hence, one morning we set out on this inevitable journey.

We took the Vicinal to Jumet. I would have failed to notice the camouflaged German airport just outside of that small town if Andrée had not pointed it out to me. From the passing streetcar the hangars looked like good old Belgian homes. (That airport was later destroyed by American bombers.)

Andrée's grandfather was not home, but we did meet with a very young aunt, her husband and their two beautiful children. They received us very warmly, and stuffed us with crepes suzettes for lunch. We did not stay as long as our host would have liked, but soon left for the Borinage. The Borinage is a coal-mining district covered with steel towers, mountains of coal and assorted heavy machinery of the mining industry. In-between the mines were the surprisingly clean if drab homes of the miners. In one of these homes, we found another of Andrée's aunts, an elderly, very quiet woman, who's son was in a German prisoner of war camp. We spent enough time with her to sip a cup of "coffee", then left for Charleroi to make some small purchases before the stores closed.

It was night when we returned to Wayaux. Our plan was to leave early enough in the morning to catch the 8 a.m. train in Charleroi for Brussels, and to arrive there early in the afternoon.

We got up before the chickens did. Papa Castin refused to let me leave empty-handed. While we were getting ready to leave, he slaughtered a rabbit for me which he had first sold to me for a ridiculous low price, since I had insisted on paying for it. Then, after a solid breakfast of bacon and eggs, and numerous hugs and kisses, we left in the company of Louise who accompanied us to the Vicinal.

The sun, just on the horizon, had as yet no effect on the morning frost. There was no one about as we slowly walked the timeworn road to the highway, leaving the charming village of Wayaux.

Louise was Andrée's little sister. The youngest was the baby Monique. Louise was slender and fragile looking. Her skin made me think of porcelain. She had dark eyes and black hair, and like the other Castin children seemed too serious for her age. But then, for a little girl, she had some heavy responsibilities. She started her day at 5 a.m. fetching water from the village pump. Then later in the day, when she returned from school, she would help with the baby, the cooking and cleaning. Mrs. Castin, called Louise her right arm. At first glance, one might have thought Louise younger than the ten or eleven year she was, but a look into her large black eyes, which seemed not too firmly suspended in her pale, pretty face, and one knew that in some ways Louise was no longer a child. When the streetcar came, she kissed us tenderly and asked us to come back soon.

Now that we were under way, I was anxious to get back to Brussels. I wanted to see my mother, and the waiting at the railway station made me nervous, especially since we were again among the green uniforms of German soldiers. Wayaux was really an island in the occupied land, despite an occasional motorized patrol that came through. I remembered with pleasure having listened to the news broadcasts of the BBC, and knew the calling codes for their various programs by heart. "The French speak to the French", "Honor and Fatherland, here is the Free France," etc.

It was easy for "them" to talk. But then, they said what I, what many, wanted to hear: 'Hold on! Have courage! Victory and Freedom will come!' And then there was the music, the military marches, the right diet for oppressed hearts..."Sambre et Meuse"...stirring up faltering spirits. And the "Marseillaise"! How much hope has it given?

The ten days I spent with the Castins had done much to bolster my physical and mental strength.

Punctual trains had almost ceased to exist. However, our train left Charleroi almost on time. We took a commuter train which had a reputation for reaching its destination much more readily than express trains because it was less subject to sabotage.

We passed the time reminiscing about our stay in Wayaux. I had put on some weight and had learned to eat field birds. I had some misadventures we could laugh about. Once, while on a walk with Joseph, I had fallen into a brook. Then I had run for dear life, after a cow I had been sketching turned into a belligerent bull.

Andrée spoke with much pride of her baby sister Monique. To me, Monique seemed like any other baby, but then, all babies seem special to their own family. I certainly thought that Rita was very special too.

To get into the house I had to get by Mirsa and Hortense. Then, after I had satisfied the landlady's curiosity about my lengthy absence with a story about a sudden ailment that overtook my father, I was alone again in my mansard.

I fried the rabbit, then went to my mother. We were glad to see each other again. Every time you saw someone you loved, you were truly happy to see them again. It was like a gift you really had no right to expect.

Mother enjoyed eating rabbit. It was probably her first. She believed that she was eating chicken. Later, after the meal, I told her the truth. She thought for a moment, then said that it had been very tasty and that the Lord was sure to forgive us. "After all, what goes into the mouth sometimes cannot be nearly as sinful as what comes out of the mouth sometimes."

The 9th. of November 1943, was a gray, cold, and wet day. The kind of weather that seemed to have been especially made to torture the sad and the hopeless. November had been that way so far. Until late that afternoon, anyway. Then a curious ripple went through the stultified city. The indifferent crowd that picked up its evening paper on the way home from work, moved with a strange excitement around the news stands for a copy of the "Le Soir", Belgian's most read newspaper.

It was not the paper they had become used to, the meek shadow of the once famous daily. The one of November 9th, had not been printed by slaves, did not contain the usual pack of lies.

The "Underground" had pulled a "big one". They had printed an edition that could not be distinguished from the daily, until one began to read it. It had been distributed, in plain daylight, by bicyclists one half hour before the usual delivery of the newspaper, and this had been done so well that the vendors did not realize there was something afoot, until the Germans began to arrest them. By that time most of the papers had been sold.

Word of the arrests spread quickly. Many vendors managed to disappear before the Germans came for them.

To say that the Nazis were upset, is putting it mildly. They reacted in their customary manner by victimizing a number of innocent people to satisfy their wrath. But some 60,000 copies of the paper, and the messages it carried, seemed to have found their way to the public. So, the underground was not just a machination of Judeo-communist propaganda, but a tangible reality.

On the front page was a large photo of Allied bombers streaking through the sky and an article by the "Front de L'Independance", the movement responsible for this subterfuge. The item spoke of the movement's hopes and aspirations under the title of "A Document." It began thusly:

'For three years we have not neglected to inform our readers objectively of events on the external as well as the internal battle scene. We have not always had the good fortune the German propagandist have, whose discovery of events always coincides splendidly with the needs of their policies. Today, however, we are privileged to submit to our readers an appeal of the Independence Movement, the interest of which cannot be denied. Etc.' (A facsimile copy of the paper is on page 160 of the original diary.)

The entire edition was permeated with scorn and irony and mockery of the Germans.

Actually, there were a number of clandestine publications that appeared rather regularly during the occupation. The most celebrated, "Libre Belgique", (Free Belgium) had already been famous during World War I. Then as now, the Germans had ceaselessly tried to discover the publisher. I am pleased to be able to say, they never succeeded to remove this thorn from their side. Other publication were not so lucky, but the Libre Belgique was not discovered. It was printed in a small format. I saw several copies at my employer "Novecol".

The young owners of "Novecol" was a couple of undying optimists with a great deal of guts to boot. Already I had decorated for them hundreds of silk hankies with patriotic motives, which they stocked and sold, so merchants could have them on hand the day of liberation. That this business entailed certain risks can hardly be denied. I delivered and picked up once a week.

Each trip to "Novecol" could have been my last to anywhere. But then, this was true for me whether or not I carried compromising items. The risks I took were not as unusual as the risk my employers took, because they did not have to take any at all.

One evening I almost did not make it with my weekly delivery. The Germans had a trap in one of the streets I had to walk through. Fortunately, for me, a man who walked some twenty yards ahead of me had the trap sprung on him. Steel-helmeted MPs emerged from the shadow of a doorway and stopped him. Needless to say, I did not hang around to find out how the poor man fared. Not long after that, a "Novecol" salesman was caught red-handed with merchandise samples somewhere in the country. Of course, he was not heard from again. "Novecol" suspended its production of patriotic items without any protest from me.

Also in November, a mysterious gentleman rented a room from Andrée's aunt Anne, who owned the café in Ixelles, as I mentioned earlier. She owned the building where the café was located, not just the café. You may also remember that the lady's husband was in a concentration camp and she lived alone with a dog and a cat. So, she was glad to have a very sympathetic young man stay at her house, even though he kept strange hours.

At the café, Anne was catering to the Germans who liked to go there from a nearby base to pour some alcohol on their joys or their sorrows. Unfortunately, dear aunt knew only a few words of German and these were directly related to her trade. Some of her guests got into heated arguments when they had too much to drink, and their were occasional scenes in the cozy café which were especially dreadful for the good woman who did not know what was going on.

Andrée hoped her aunt would shelter me in her house should I have to abandon my lodging. Hence, we ventured to visit the café from time to time and became aware of the goings on there. Of course, we tried to be there during slow hours of the day, such as early Sunday morning or afternoon, but at times there were more customers there than expected. We then retreated to the kitchen in aunt's apartment on the second floor to lessen the chance of attracting attention to ourselves.

On one of those occasion we learned to our surprise, that the young man who had moved into the house, was not a exactly a bachelor but had a woman and child with him. His room was adjacent to aunt's kitchen, and we heard the child call the young man 'daddy'. Apparently the walls were thin. We certainly did not listen to what was going on behind them. Actually, I liked to take advantage of our visits to aunt's kitchen to listen to the BBC or radio Moscow. Aunt had an excellent radio.

It could be that in spite of our precautions some of the radio emission found its way through the thin wall to the young man's room. Be this as it may, the mysterious young man finished by taking aunt into his confidence. And, apparently she confided in him also. The result was that aunt informed me one day, that the man would provide a genuine false Belgian ID for me, if I let him have my real one and a photo of myself for a while. He did not know when he would be back with the papers and suggested that I check with aunt regularly.

My real ID was of no value to me now except once a month when I went downtown to the city's distribution center of ration stamps to pick up mine and my mother's. To be stopped without an ID was probably not worse than to be stopped with a Jew-card. So, I gladly took a chance.

Thus it came to pass that Andrée and I went to the café early on Sunday afternoons for several weeks, in the hope that the mysterious young man would have brought the promised identification.

The German military, who frequented the café seemed not very dangerous. Actually, I enjoyed listening to their conversations and pretend I didn't understand one word of German when one chanced to talk to me. My feigned ignorance of the Teutonic tongue would at times cause some merriment. Soldiers would remark about the ignorance of the Belgians, and then give us a sample of their own by trying to talk French.

I suppose they really did not have much to talk about and were grateful for any diversion that provided them with subject matter.

Two German air-force men were at the bar of the café when we arrived one day. We had seen them before, knew them to be harmless, and decided to stay for a while. For some reason they were drinking more beer than usual. Having a rather low alcohol content, the beer took a while to have any effect. The two had enough to affect their equilibrium. One of them had his bladder activated, the other his emotions. While the first went on frequent short trips to the man's room in the hallway, the other producing a tear, stumbled over to the bar where aunt was polishing glasses, and lamented about the war and about Herr Hitler. Aunt, who understood only a few word of German, about ordering drinks, put on her kindest smile and nodded gently. This encouraged the fellow, a middle-aged farmer type, to more lamentation. However, as soon as the nail-studded boots of his returning comrade could be heard in the hallway, he shed his woeful expression and whispered fearfully: "Here comes my friend! Psst! I have not said anything." And with a gesture, obviously intended to erase his earlier breakdown of morale, he hastened back to their table.

I suppose it was too much to hope for no unpleasant experience. It began that Sunday afternoon with a big, fat, half drunk oaf. By that time we had become known to the air-force men as regular customers, we must have been to the café a half a dozen times, and perhaps because of this acquaintance they tried to protect Andrée from the dishonorable advances of the half drunk oaf who took a fancy to her as soon as he got in the door.

Andrée's fiery rebuttal of the man aroused his ire, so that she finally wound up behind the bar in an effort to put something between her and the German Don Juan. In the meantime, the situation was getting to the point where I could not sit idly by. The air force men realized this, and I must say, that things might well have turned out badly, had they not stepped in.

And, because an attempt at friendly persuasion did not work, the two dragged the lovelorn guy physically from the café. They returned laughing, wiping perspiration off their red faces, then offered me schnapps and cigarettes.

One of the heroes, a non-com who spoke French fairly, apologized for the disturbance and assured us that the drunk was lucky not to have gotten out of hand. That he was with GHQ and could have gotten the offending slob into all sorts of trouble, including a transfer to some unpleasant assignment, which was not an uncommon punishment for those members of the armed forces who did not know how to behave.

I had enough for one day and would have liked to leave right then. Besides, there was no telling what turn our conversation would take. However, to take leave so suddenly, now that these soldiers had been so kind to us, might have changed their mood or arouse their suspicion.

Auntie, still pale, slowly calming herself. Andrée went upstairs to put herself back together and to check once more if the mysterious Mr. X, as we called the young man now, had not returned.

In the meantime, the soldiers had decided to talk seriously to auntie and me about the future of Belgium. They thought Belgium should be annexed to Germany in compensation for war damages caused in Germany by British bombings.

While this bit of logic polluted the air more guests arrived. A German civilian followed by a army officer, and a tall, red-headed soldier of athletic bearing and the hard-set features of a man of little heart. There was no doubt that these were not ordinary soldiers and that the civilian was a Gestapo agent. Not only was this trio not quite sober, but they were also in an ugly mood.

To my relief they acted as if I did not exist. The officer ordered cognac and sat with the red head at a table, while the civilian stayed at the bar and commenced to chat with auntie.

The two soldiers, who only moments earlier had talked to us, now silently emptied their glasses and left. Their departure took with it whatever safety I had felt. I moved to another table, one on which a newspaper had been left, and pretended to be totally absorbed by it. Actually, I listened closely to the Germans, and the table I had chosen was the one nearest to the back door. Night had fallen. I hoped to reach the blacked-out street in a matter of seconds should the need arise.

These Germans drank cognac as if it were water. Their voices rose. The civilian, in pigeon French, compared auntie favorably to his mother. The officer began to sing some sentimental German song about real soldiers who emptied their bowls on velvet.

"I am really a good man," the civilian intoned at the bar, "but everybody hates me. Auntie, for lack of anything better to do, replenished his schnapps. During all this time, the red-head drank silently throwing the civilian dirty looks. Suddenly, cursing vilely and banging the table with his huge fists, he arose. The officer stopped his sentimental song, grabbed the red-head and tried to dissuade him from doing anything that might be regretted later. Alas, his effort was in vain. The athlete pushed the meddlesome officer aside, and pouncing on the civilian began to shake him with great gusto: "You innocent lamb, you dog! What did you do with the package?"

The civilian turned white. The officer had hastened to the two and tried to separate them. Thanks to this interference, the civilian had regained the use of his arms long enough to produce a "Luger" from a pocket in his overcoat and uttered: "We will see who is going to kill who" at the red-head who had suggested ending the civilians' life..

At this, auntie let out an appropriate scream. The officer abandoned his reconciliatory efforts and jumped skillfully out of the pistol's aim. I thought the fight was over, but I was wrong. The pistol failed to intimidate the red-head. With the agility of the professional, he simply knocked the weapon from the civilian's hand, and landed a huge freckled fist in his surprised face. The blow threw the man over a table and a chair and had him land unceremoniously on the floor. Stone sober now, the officer had recovered some of his dignity, and his pistol in hand posted himself between the belligerents, cursing and threatening both. This time he was more successful. The civilian arose slowly, and while wiping blood from his eyes groaned sadly: "You have struck me, me your friend, and I have not even touched you. That will have dire consequences for you, my dear!"

For a moment it looked as if the red-head, who seemed to be content with his fist-work, was going to reopen the hostilities. However, the officer, gesticulating wildly with his enormous pistol and shouting from the top of his lungs prevented further complications. Auntie stood pale and trembling behind the bar. I still had the newspaper in my hands and did not know what to do.

Finally, the officer threw the redhead out, took the civilian's pistol from the floor, and dragged the civilian, who was still spitting blood, from the café.

Auntie, recovering already, began to clean up while I ran upstairs to look for Andrée. I found her in the kitchen listening to music on the radio. The disturbance downstairs had not reached her. I had no more desire to wait for Mr. X. Besides, now we would have to hurry to catch the last streetcar.

Before going downstairs, I listened carefully for unusual noises, but all seemed to be very quiet in the café. We went downstairs and took leave from auntie who assured us that she was alright and kissing us good-bye pressed some cards into my hand.

Mr. X had just been here after all.

My name is Henri Joseph Leon Girard. I am a resident of Mont sur Marchienne, district of Charleroi, a native of the city of Antwerp. A Belgian citizen.

The ID was perfectly made. It was genuine, that is, Henri Girard really existed. I knew that I was a very lucky guy to have received such a document. In fact, it was worth a fortune, but Mr. X, who must have taken grave risks getting the ID, refused to take any compensation.

Of course, this card did not guarantee my safety, I was still circumcised, but it made me much safer. At least I felt much safer. My Jew-card had been returned to me also. Andrée hid it on her person for the trip home.

I tried to become my new identity, had calling cards made, and changed the signature on my drawings. I hid or destroyed all references to my real self, the Hermann Kosak. Andrée called me Henri instead of Harry. I bought a student's cap and "went home" to Charleroi almost weekly to visit my family.

From there I would return with stories that were likely to satisfy the curiosity of my landlady and of my landlord. Fortunately, they had always thought of me as Henri and as being from Charleroi. (What a coincidence!)

Actually, when I was supposed to be in Charleroi, I was only two blocks away in Andrée's apartment building. There, on the seventh floor was a spare bedroom-storeroom where Andrée slept when her employers had over-night guests, which hardly ever happened. Each apartment in the building had such a room on the seventh floor.

Although I did not go very far, these "trips" had to be carefully planned. There were few trains to Charleroi. "I had to make one of them." But, as I could not be safely smuggled into or out of the apartment building until night, I had to spend the time I had between the "leaving to catch my train" and the entrance into the building on errands or visiting friends. This on days when someone besides myself was in the house.

The broad avenue leading to the apartment building was ideal for hiding in the dark. Cars could be heard approaching, and there were places I could dash to, bushes, spaces between buildings, entry ways and a large mailbox. Waiting for Andrée in the dark was not pleasant, now that it was often cold and rainy. When I had cigarettes, I could pass the time smoking. Of course, I had to be careful to hide the glowing red tip which could be seen for quite a distance.

Eventually, there would be some movement, ever so faint a light at the building entrance, and the clicking of the lock could be heard. I waited to make sure what emerged from the building was indeed Andrée, and Tiphram in search of bladder-relief. A soft whistle informed me that all was clear and that my waiting was over for this time.

Occasionally, the appearance of the dog was deceiving, because on beautiful nights her boss was with him rather than Andrée. This meant additional waiting for me. Eventually, Andrée would show up and let me into the building. As it was always late, we did not have to worry about the concierge. He had to get up at five in the morning and was fast asleep. Most other residents were apparently asleep as well. We never ran into anyone.

Always hungry, sometimes freezing and soaking wet, I would hurry through the marble hallway to the waiting elevator. Andrée handed me the key to the room on the seventh floor, then got off on the third.

I had seen to it that the door and its lock to the spare room worked silently and smoothly. Once inside, I locked myself in, made sure that the window' blackout was in place, then turned the light on. The room was narrow and small. There was a bed, a wardrobe, a washbasin, a footlocker and a small table and chair. This items took up nearly all the available space.

One other person slept on the seventh floor. Unfortunately, he slept in the room next door, making it necessary for me to be noiseless. Therefor, as soon as I had the light on, I removed my shoes. Then I devoured what food Andrée had managed to snitch for me during the week. I would find it neatly arranged on the little table, and there was always some real coffee or tea. Sometimes there were such extras as cigarettes, soap and towel.

Soon I would be in bed, an iron bed that was so much better than mine. It was luxuriously provided with fresh linen and soft, warm blankets. I had no sheets in mine. I slept like the proverbial rock.

Although there was no escape from the room on the seventh floor, I felt quite secure there. True, the use of the toilet, located in the hallway, did present a problem which unnerved me at times. But, I was lucky and never encountered anyone on my furtive surrender to nature's demands.

Andrée came to check on me whenever she could get away from her duties. She brought books, something hot to drink. The room was not heated.

Sometimes, when her employers were to be gone for an afternoon or an evening, I would go down to the apartment on the third floor, take a bath, listen to the radio. Andrée would prepare a dinner, usually French fries and a green salad, and we would consume this feast in the lovely dining room.

Haunted by visions of an unexpected return of the master of the house, I never was at ease on these occasions. But Andrée was so pleased with herself, I did not have the heart to tell her about my nervousness and my misgivings. She seemed to be perfectly relaxed during these rather peculiar situations.

After three days on the seventh floor, I departed the same way I came in, either late at night or very early in the morning, to return to my own lodging. Right now, it was very cold in both places.

In my room, I wore my overcoat and gloves from which I had cut the fingertips off, so I could work wearing them. Still, at times, my hands became too stiff to hold a brush and I had to do calisthenics to get going again.

I began to miss the one warm meal I had with the Cauberghs each day, for I had stopped eating with them. Hortense insisted on my ration of butter and oleo, and I could not make this sacrifice, especially since she used neither in her cooking. Besides, dealing in the black market the way she did, I could not understand why she needed my monthly five ounces of butter which was not available every month anyway.

Andrée, who as you know, supplemented my diet, could not get me any fat. Yet, with what I could afford on the black market, I managed to consume at least twice the allotted ration.

My room was in the second house of the street, next to a corner where three streets met. On two of these corners were small cafés where mostly beer was served, if one can call the yellowish liquid of that time beer.

One of these places was run by an elderly couple and their daughter, the other by an elderly woman and her daughter. The man of that family had been removed by the Germans as a "Communist Agent" long ago.

As it was, some bits of gossip seemed to circulate about people in the neighborhood, and I wondered if I had been noticed enough to have one circulating about me. I did go through all kinds of shenanigans to be as unnoticeable as possible. For example, before leaving, I climbed on my table and peeked through the skylight into the street to make sure there were no Germans around and no one was loitering. Ordinarily, there was no one, but one time, I noticed to my terror, that a Gestapo sedan was parked across the street from the house. Instead of leaving, I locked myself in and strained my ears. A few times I thought that I heard something, but it was nothing. The biggest noise came from my pounding heart.

Later I learned that one of the women from one of the cafés had been arrested for procuring falsified IDs.

Shortly after this incident, the former Mayor of our district of Woluwe St. Lambert, was assassinated. Gossip had it that the Gestapo called on him and accused him of hiding Jews. They searched his home and found no evidence. Never the-less, in the basement they shot him in the back. His pregnant wife made a fuss and was shot also. The whole neighborhood was in commotion. "Look what happened to those who help Jews!"

I was glad that the weekend was at hand and I was able to go "home" for a couple of days.

Anne Van Dyck had insisted that I visit her from time to time so she could be assured that I was well. I had not done this because I knew that Anne's parents were unhappy about their daughter's sympathy for me, and also because Andrée was very jealous. But Anne was a friend and still a student at the academy, and in spite of everything, I had called on her a few weeks ago to discuss with her my need for a student card. For although my ID was excellent, it claimed me to be a student, and I needed proof. I might have approached Mr. Dirkx on the subject, but did not want to ask him to take more risks on my account. I thought Anne prudent and discrete enough not to take unnecessary chances. Anyway, I had given her my address to make it possible for her to get in touch with me.

So, one day, there she was. She brought me a loaf of bread, hoping that I would accept it, explaining that she had been shopping, and passing the house had thought of me, and had wanted to see if I was all right. She did not have a student card as yet, but wanted to assure me that she was working on it.

Of course, I did take the bread, although it was a little embarrassing, but Anne seemed rather embarrassed herself about her visit, and I did not want to add to her predicament.

I did not dare to tell Andrée of Anne's visit, nor of the following one shortly thereafter. This time, Anne brought the coveted student card. She told me that she had kept an eye on the registrar's office, and when she found it unattended had walked in and helped herself to the card from one of the files!

I was sure that Anne must have had her heart in her throat, but she was quite proud that she had the courage to do what she did.

I did tell Andrée about the card, and that I had received it from Anne. She did not seem particularly enthusiastic about it, but to my surprise, she did not ask any questions, even though my story had been vague.

It was very cold and I froze almost constantly. My ears and feet were a continuing source of painful discomfort, especially while I was working. I was rarely short of work which was fortunate because prices kept going up and everything was terribly expensive.

My small electric hot plate was used for a few minutes now and then, when I felt that I could not bear the cold any longer. But I dared not to turn it on as much as I would have liked to, because it was against the law to use more than 75% of the electricity one had used before the war. And, the wire I had run from the basement to my room was hooked up to the Cauberghs' circuit. What I did not know, was that the Cauberghs were too stingy to buy fuses, and replaced blown ones with pennies. As a consequence, it happened that one day I turned on my hot plate and blew the master fuse. Only an employee of the power company had access to that one. We were without current for three days. I got my ears full about this, including from the woman with the baby on the second floor, with whom my relationship had just begun to improve.

It was Anne who had caused this improvement, suggesting that I court that biddy. Surely, Anne claimed, as homely as the woman is, she could not get much attention from men. Especially, now when there was a shortage of men. Unattractive as this idea was, I could not deny its merit. So, I made some small talk with the woman when I happened to encounter her, offered her something sweet for herself or the child, or at least some compliments.

Slowly our relationship improved. We exchanged books, and she had offered a pot of hot water for coffee or tea. I had not taken her up on her offer, fearing that having tea with her would come next, and so on. Now it seemed that whatever good will the woman had developed towards me was lost.

What made matters worse, was that soon after I had blown the master fuse, I used the hot plate again and blew the master fuse again. This time I was desperate enough to dash to the phone by the streetcar terminal to call the power company at once, imploring them to repair the damage without delay for the sake of a sick baby in the house. To my surprise and great relief, a man did come early in the afternoon to take care of the problem. I went with him to the basement and held a flashlight for him while he worked.

This was when he saw the pennies in the fuse holders and my hookup to the line. The man said quietly that not only was the hookup and the pennies against the law, but that the wrong wire had been used for the extension. I told him that I had been unable to find someone to do the job correctly and that it would be redone as soon as possible. I felt safe with this story because labor was so hard to come by. The man did not say anything but smiled. When he was done, and I had paid him, he told me that should the master fuse blow again, the current would not be restored for three month. Then he added, that I should not worry about him, as he was a decent patriot, but that I should be weary when I encountered strangers because I spoke French with a very slight but never the-less noticeable accent. I never used the hot plate again.

Andrée was unhappy about the way I froze, and had somehow mentioned it to her employer. The result was that the Baroness de Heel sent word that she wanted to see me. Andrée was overjoyed, believing that the baroness had decided to help.

At the appointed time, we met in the cozy living room of the de Heels. The baroness was very polite, as was her dog Tiphram. Her ladyship thought it strange that her dog liked me, for he usually indulged in the worst hostility towards visitors and had to be locked in another room. I assured Madamme that I always enjoyed the friendship of dogs, and thought how surprised she would be if she knew that Tiphram and I were old acquaintances.

Madamme then asked me how I was coming along, and told me that she had heard I was suffering some discomfort because of the cold weather. She reminded me that she had kept me in her home for three nights, and that all her friends thought she had been very brave indeed. I assured her that I had not forgotten her kindness and that I would always be very grateful to her.

She neglected to offer me a cigarette when she lit one for herself, which was very bad form in those days, and said, "Well, I want to help you again. This time I want to give you some valuable advice. Go and buy yourself a stove! The winter will be very hard and you might catch cold."

Used to surprises by now, I managed to keep a straight face. Besides, I could ill afford to offend these people who had helped me and knew where I lived. So, I thanked her for her kindness, her time, and her valuable advice.

Madamme told me not to mention it, then instructed Andrée to give me some soup and prepare an omelet for the dog. Tiphram always had an omelet in the afternoon, she informed me. The dog and I followed an angry Andrée to the kitchen, and the baroness joined us to keep me entertained while the dog and I ate. She told me that the good Lord may overlook the fact that I am a Jew if I prayed assiduously. She herself went to mass at seven o'clock each morning.

I was going to say something, but caught Andrée's warning eye. So, I commented on the excellence of the soup instead. Madamme then admitted that Andrée's insistence on seeing me from time to time made her unhappy. After all, the girl was like a child to her who was childless. I had to listed to the story of how Madamme remembered the very day Andrée came to her. A child of thirteen and so cute!

I thought, you give her eight dollars a month when the going rate for domestics is fourteen. And you have Andrée work twelve hours, seven days a week, when domestics work eight hours, six days a week. Eight dollars bought one and one-half pound of butter at the time.

Shortly after this interview, I did buy a coke stove. But I had planned and saved for it long before Madamme de Heel's advice. The square little stove was a thing of beauty. Its dark red tiles gleamed, promising warmth and comfort. My landlord had agreed to let me install the stove, providing I would leave it behind whenever I moved. I tried it out with some paper, and it worked as well as it looked.

The allotted ration of coal was four pounds a day, but I was never able to get any on the regular market. On the black market the cost of coal was over twenty dollars for some two-hundred pounds. Purchasing the stove had left me financially exhausted. It was a while before I could buy some coke. But I rejoiced at the thought that soon a warm room would be mine. What's more, I would be able to have some warm food also.

There were no more letters or messages from Jews who had been deported. Gruesome stories about their fate were now the main subject of conversation when Jews chanced to meet.

Reports, supposedly from German soldiers, who should know what they were talking about, were about salt mines, coal mines, inhuman treatment and exterminations.

The barracks of Dossin, in Malines, where arrested Jews were organized into transports, were only some twenty miles from Brussels. In Malines, the Germans indulged themselves into some pretenses, but if the treatment to which people were subjected there was a sample of what was to follow, we were not entitled to any illusions about our destiny should we fall into the hands of the super race.

Hence, in spite of German efforts to conceal their plans from their victims - why create resistance - we did know about concentration camps, and although no one could or would really imagine what it meant, one felt it.

A few Belgian Jews, well known personalities, had been released after being arrested because of the personal intervention of members of the Royal family. Others, who lacked such superb connections, had on rare occasions regained freedom - or death - by desperate escape attempts. It seems that some people would loosen floor boards of the freight cars in which they had been packed. This could not been done until the person who had been made accountable by the Germans for every prisoner on the car, and who was to stick a little flag through one of the vents of the car to alert the guards on the roofs of rebellious behavior, had been incapacitated. Then these desperadoes let themselves drop from the moving train between the rails.

Others would manage to force open the sealed door and jump off. (Hard to believe). Guards on the roofs were watching for escapees and machine-gunned who they could. Some survived. Of course, all attempted escapes had to be made before the train left Belgium. After all, in Germany one could not count on help from the local population. It seems that partisans followed the transports to pick up survivors, as did the Germans. The Germans took the wounded they found to hospitals to get them back into transportable condition.

One day, members of the underground (partisans), dressed as SS, drove up to a hospital, picked up the ambulant wounded and freed those.

I was made aware of these escapes one day when I chanced to walk by the studio of the photographer Polak. I looked at the house from across the street. It seemed inhabited. On an impulse, I went to the door and rang the bell, hoping that whoever lived there now might be able to tell me something about the fate that had overtaken my former employer. Imagine my surprise when Mr. Polak opened the door. He looked older and thinner and his hair was now totally white, but he managed a smile when he saw me and invited me in. So I learned that he was one of those who had been released because the Queen mother, Elizabeth, had interceded on his behalf.

He had to swear silence about his experience to the Germans, but he promptly told me about it anyway. Mr. Polak was sure that the Nazis would destroy him before the war was over, and he felt no obligation to keep any arrangement they had forced on him.

Essentially, the Germans had used him as a photographer. He had to take pictures of escapees who had been shot, people who had been tortured, others who had been murdered.

Polak's prophecy about himself was all too true. Before long he was arrested once more. This time, no one bailed him out. He was not heard of again, and I must assume that he and his family perished.

Not only did my stove work well, but it only used ten pounds of coke a day. Unfortunately, the combustion was not easily controlled. My room became so warm at times, I had to open the skylight. Also, this heating device was not made to cook on. Still, I could get potatoes at least partially cooked. These were much more palatable than the uncooked ones I had been forced to eat sometimes.

The mainstay of my diet consisted of potatoes and of smoked herrings then. Because the herrings were very salty, I mixed them with the potatoes into a sort of mash. The bread sold in the stores could not be eaten fresh. When fresh, it was almost like mud in texture. Its odor was quite distinctive, and although I don't know what it was made of, potato peelings seem to have been its main ingredient. A loaf was a week's ration that began to mold on the second day of its existence. Fortunately it was filling.

The ration was two slices a day now. Not much if one had not much else to eat. On the black market its cost had risen to ten dollars per loaf. then. This amounted now to the price the Germans paid for information leading to the apprehension of a Jew.

There was not much one could put on the bread. The amount of fats available were best used for cooking. Jam was a luxury. The ten ounces of monthly ration was artificial, made from coal tar. It looked like *jello*, but as for the taste, well, one had to get used to it.

Interestingly enough, I had a special craving for jam. Once, Andrée gave me a jar, I tasted it and could not stop until I had devoured all of it!

Kindling wood was not only expensive, but also hard to come by. I usually started my stove with paper. That was kind of tricky, but usually I succeeded. To have enough paper on hand, I began to buy the official daily newspaper "*L'Avenir*" at the news stand by the cemetery gate. It went on sale shortly after five in the afternoon. To read it became my entertainment during the long cold and silent evening hours. It was intriguing to read the German version of life and war and then try to guess the truth.

To purchase the paper one had to have the exact change. I managed to buy it regularly for quite a while. Then one day, to my great annoyance, I did not have the exact change, and could not go to get my copy.

Early the next morning, I was surprised to receive the visit of a rather hysterical Anne (Segers). She told me half crying - half laughing, that she had not slept all night, because the day before, when she passed "my" house on the streetcar shortly after five PM, she had seen two German MPs posted in the entrance. My house was almost at a corner, and the Germans had chosen it as a good place to stop pedestrians for an ID check once they came around the corner. Our entrance door was one spot I could not see when I looked from the skylight into the street before going out.

Shortly thereafter, Ernst who had visited me, ran into MP.s in my doorway when he left. Fortunately, at that moment they were busy with someone and overlooked him, who instead of walking on came back upstairs. They probably would not have bothered with him because he was under military age, looked even younger than he was and not at all Jewish. Still, he didn't have false papers.

Anyway, at the moment I was angry with Ernest for having come back into the house, wondering if he had attracted the Germans' attention.

Fortunately, the effect of a trap wore off when it became known, and the Germans desisted soon of using the entrance to my hideout for their nefarious activity.

It would have been a miracle had my landlord remained unaware of my free-lance work. Of course, students often worked their way through school, and there was nothing unusual about that, but they were hardly doing what I did. I was now getting private requests for "patriotic" hankies, even though I had stopped making them for a living. I had to make one for the landlord's daughter, then one for her best friend, and so on. I disliked risking my life and those of the silly purchasers and eventually declined favors of this kind.

By that time, though not afraid of the Cauberghs, I worried about their ignorance. That they had talked about my hankies to their friends, meant that they had talked about me.

I was still very busy and often worked till late at night. As I mentioned before, this gave me a good excuse for sleeping late in the morning, saved me from having to eat breakfast, and gave me the satisfaction of having cheated another day of terror of a few hours. Small victories like that were important when there was little else to sustain morale.

We were only a few days from Christmas 1943. It was late, I was still working when there was a knock on my door. I was startled because I had not heard anyone in the staircase, the dog had not barked, and the rapping on the door was not one I was familiar with.

I recovered at once, however, because I knew that Germans never arrived without shouting and much banging.

At the door was a small elderly lady. She was clad in black, a black shawl framed her round and rosy, if plain face, reminding me of the type of women encountered in the country.

We looked each other over for a moment before she said quietly,

"Good evening young man. I see you have it nice and cozy here."

I bad her in and asked who she was.

"I am a friend of your landlady, and you have refused to paint the flags of the Allies on a hankie for me."

A little annoyed, I explained my reasons. She took a pocket-sized newspaper from her black handbag and put it on my table. It was the latest edition of the underground newspaper, "L'Insoumis". "I hope that you will be kind enough to paint that hankie for me after all," she said, "I would like it for Christmas. Bring it to me tomorrow and I will give you a pail of coal."

She gave me her address. I gave her five francs for the "L'Insoumis". Then she was gone.

In the meantime, I had taken my student ID card, the one Anne had procured, to Mr. X at auntie's café, to have it filled out professionally. Unfortunately when I got it back I noticed that a mistake had been made with the student number. And, although this mistake had been corrected, the correction was noticeable. (see page 185 of the original diary.)

I took that student ID card to city hall, paid the student fee of 150 francs, and had the stamps affixed which made the card a legal document.

Because my mother liked Andrée, the latter went with me occasionally when I visited her. Although it was good to see that we had survived another week yet, those visits were mostly sad. As much as we tried to avoid depressing conversation, we never quite succeeded. After all, our experiences at that time were of anguish and deprivations. The prospects for liberation dimmed as time went on. We were sure that Hitler would be defeated eventually, but already most of us were not around to see the day. The rate at which the Allies were progressing seemed considerable slower than the rate at which we were being eliminated.

Who would be left when the Allies finally came to Brussels?

However, Andrée's vitality and exuberance were a welcomed diversion when mother and I got together. Instead of concentrating on our miseries, we concentrated on talking to Andrée and most of my mind was occupied with translating.

Mother talked more and more about wanting to see Margit. I had hoped at first that this was a whim that would pass, but instead it became an obsession. At the mere mention of my sister's name, my mother burst into tears.

All I knew was that Margit was somewhere in the Ardennes. Dirkx assured me from time to time that she was safe and well. What more could one ask for? Never the-less *Mother had to see Margit*. Very reluctantly, I broached the subject to Mr. Dirkx. Some people would have to take serious risks to bring Margit to Brussels. Of course, she also would be at risk. Dirkx promised to try to arrange a meeting between Margit and mother, and I was happy to be able to bring this news home. However, I had argued so much against such a meeting that mother did not believe me.

Some people seem to be blessed with an abundance of good fortune. No matter what evil lurks for them, they will walk away from it, "smelling like a rose," as the saying goes. Mrs. Dirkx told me that she was certain that I was thusly charmed. Also she claimed I had "golden hands."

Then there are people who seem to be quite lucky, until suddenly their luck runs out. As if luck were a bank account. One can draw on it as long as the balance is good, then one is overdrawn.

For others, everything turns out badly. They are troubled from the day they are born until they die. My poor mother seemed to have been one of the latter. There was something wrong with her skin when she was born. It peeled off. A major disaster she barely survived. Her mother died when she was thirteen, and so on. Nothing ever worked out well for her. She was very sensitive, and the amazing thing is that nothing appeared to have touched her spiritual inclination, and that she had not a mean bone in her body or in her soul. She was afraid of this world, bewildered and dismayed by it, but I can't recall any hatred in her.

She rarely went to religious services. She came to holiday services when as a boy I was singing in the choir of our synagogue, but perhaps she came to hear and see me. Yet, she had an unshakable belief in God.

Mother and I never had a serious talk about what we thought or felt until this winter of '43. Of course, there had been much tension in our home between my stepfather, me, and her. Also, it could be that in those days, parents did not confide in their children. Heart to heart talks were not in fashion. At least not in our family. But now, we would sit in mother's dreary kitchen, at her simple wooden table, and she would talk about her fears, her long, lonely, sleepless nights; her hunger, her cold, her pains, her worries about everybody. I kept begging her to move in with Lintschi, (Karoline Rosenberg), my stepfather's cousin. Uncle Simon and grandmother Helena lived in that house and mother would not be so lonely. No place could be said to be safer than another. She wouldn't do that, she couldn't do that. I implored her to at least sleep upstairs in the mansard, my room before I had left home. It was possible that the Germans would not know to look for her there should they show up. She refused.

Lintschi had overbearing manners, the house was already full of Jews, and "God is everywhere. He can take or give to one, no matter where one happens to be. *Remember that*!"

Never the-less, mother was afraid. An apartment on the second floor had become vacant and "God knows who is going to move in!" She had a Jewish family in mind. They were supposed to move because they had a baby whose crying bothered a neighbor. What could I say? A Jewish family moving in could be fatal. A gentile family moving in could be fatal.

Naturally, mother and I would have preferred to have her in hiding. I had been looking for a place for her constantly. But, she could not speak French or Flemish. Not enough to get by. Still, with some luck it should have been possible to find her a place offering greater safety than her official, registered residence. Everyone I talked to promised to do their best to help find a place. But nothing ever came of it. Mother never discussed the subject with me, never urged me to do anything for her.

On Christmas day, (Andrée's birthday) I had good news for mother. Margit would be at Dirkx's on Sunday, January 4th. (1944) at ten in the morning. I would take mother there, hoping fervently for good luck for all involved.

As far as hankies and lampshades were concerned, the season was supposed to be over, but I had plenty of work, which was a blessing. I was nervous and restless, but being busy, kept me from delving on our miseries. I managed to be totally absorbed by work through the New Year. Had not seen Andrée for days. She had been busy with preparations for the holidays, to properly celebrate the birth of Christ, the one who would save mankind.

Andrée as well as her employers were very religious. So far the Savior had not done so well. But then, he had very little help from his followers.

I could have gone to Charleroi, to be with "my parents", but I feared the inactivity and stillness of the room on the seventh floor. Also that place was unheated while my room was now nice and warm. Besides, there was no reason to worry that the people in the house would think it strange that I did not go home for the holidays. *They* were all gone to be with relatives.

The 4th. of January 1944, was a cold, but beautiful, cloudless day. I arrived at mother's early and found her impatient, nervous and ready to go.

On the way we discussed what we should tell Margit about her father, and decided that we should tell her some white lie about why he had not come with us to see her. Some day she would have to know the truth, but the later the better. She would be older, and better circumstances would make it be easier on her to cope we hoped.

We stopped to buy some candy for Margit. A present from her dad. Still, early, we went to a café near the "Sports Palace", close to the Dirk' residence, (Ave. Suffrage Universelle)to drink a glass of cheap wine for the benefit of our cold limbs. I phoned Dirkx from there for a final check, and got the go-ahead. Margit had arrived safely. (Phone calls had to be in code, because censored!)

The reunion was very emotional. Mother hugged Margit frantically and everyone cried. I went to the window and stared at the limpid blue sky. I heard Margit ask about dad, and momentarily grew tense. But my fourteen year old sister was satisfied with mother's explanation for father's absence, while she was kissing her and exclaiming, "my dear child, my dear child."

Margit looked good and well-cared for, and I could tell that mother was vastly relieved. Eventually, we sat around the dinner table, and Mrs. Dirkx served food, but no one seemed to able to eat much. Mother and Mrs. Dirkx talked to each other, one in German the other in French, and like with Andrée, these women seemed to understand each other perfectly.

Mother was unwilling to let Margit from her arms, and the inevitable good bye was rather painful. Dreading it, I was relieved when we finally were on the way back to mother's place.

We made the trip in silence, but once we were home, mother talked about how happy she was to have seen Margit so well, and so grown up, and how nice the Dirkxs were, and what a lovely apartment they had and such paintings!

Maybe Christ saved some people after all. But Arthur Dirkx was a devout atheist. Bertha, his wife, was a devout Catholic.

On the 12th of January, an errant had brought me to mother's neighborhood. It was 9 p.m. when I stopped to see her for a few minutes before returning to my place. She sat at the kitchen table. Unusually pale, she was reading the Bible. In the light of the naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling, the kitchen with its bare furniture looked drearier than ever, and mother thinner and grayer than ever.

She smiled, "There you are. I have been waiting for you," she said softly as usual, though she could not have known that I was coming by. And, already she tinkered with a pot on the stove to fix a bite to eat. She always kept something ready just in case I should stop by.

"I have been so frightened a few minutes ago," she said in a voice echoing her fear. "Imagine! Someone knocked at the door. Not on the front door, but on the bedroom door! How could anyone be in there? I was paralyzed with fear and stood here staring at the door. Just as I thought that I must have imagined it, the door handle moved. When I finally had the courage to look, no one was there behind the door. What a bad omen! I hope nothing has happened to my husband!"

She lit the gas under the pot on the stove, put a plate on the table and sat down facing me. She was terribly distressed. Her hands had been slightly trembling now for a while. One hardly noticed, unless she was handling a small object. Now she held her hands together to steady them.

Her despair was contagious. I began to ache with it. I tried to tell her that all was the consequence of the terrible strain she had experienced for such a long time. It could lead people to seeing things and hearing things that were not there, to give in to superstitions.

I must not have been very convincing. She let me talk, lifting her shoulders wearily while I ran out of words.

She put some rutabaga before me, and I took the opportunity to change the subject by commenting on her cooking, how she could make something out of nothing. Actually, I was too depressed to eat, but did not dare leave one speck of the ghastly vegetable on my plate, for fear of adding to her distress.

Her small, broken oven was cold. She had a chronic tooth-ache and sore throat.

Once or twice we listened intently to some noise coming from somewhere in the house or from the street. I tried desperately to think of good news, but nothing seemed worthwhile talking about.

She had a piece of bread she wanted me to take under the pretext that it was too hard for her to chew. I could not take the bread and told her she should soak it in "coffee" or hot water before eating it.

As always, mother embraced me when I left and gave me some last minute advice while her trembling hands patted my cheeks.

Going down the stairs, I turned to wave as she stood in the door. Her black eyes glowed sadly in her pale face, her white hair glimmered in the cold and frugal light. Her lips moved in a prayer as she nodded to me.

Then when I was in the street, as always I heard mother's window open. Although she could barely see me in the dark, she would anxiously watch me go away, while we both wondered whether or not we would see each other again.

The following morning, I was about to begin work on a large order of lampshades when Andrée came to see me. Her haste and nervous rapping on my door gave me an ominous feeling. Then when she stood before me, face aglow with agony, I knew already.

I stood there frozen in a new pain while Andrée, stammered pitifully through an effort to tell me: "You...you...I mean...one has. When did you see your mother?"

"Last night." I managed.

"I think," Andrée said, "I think...Well, perhaps nothing terrible has happened....I got a phone call.. Someone told me that your mother...last night...I mean, she went on a trip."

Andrée's voice seemed to come from far away. I could not feel my legs and had troubles breathing. I wanted to scream, moaned instead and burst into tears while I held on to the bedstead, quivering.

Then suddenly it was over. I regained control of myself, dressed to go out while assuring the distressed Andrée that I would be alright.

Andrée went back to her job, and I left to call on Lintschi. I knew that it was Lintschi who had called, because I had given her Andrée's phone number for use in desperate situations only.

All Lintschi knew was that the Gestapo had dragged mother from her bed at two o'clock in the morning.

She warned me to stay away from the place, but I wanted to talk to our neighbor, Poldi.

Before long I was at mother's door reading the seal of the German Security Service. It was pasted over the lock and promised all kinds of evil to anyone who would indulge in tampering with it and the door behind it.

Poldi looked as if she had a bad night. Sucking furiously on one of her homemade cigarettes she elaborated on what had happened.

Six Germans had come to the house. Two stayed downstairs while the others had gone from door to door to look for the Sterns. This was the family mother had just talked into moving to the second floor apartment. They found them quickly enough, but did not arrest them. The Sterns were a mixed marriage. She was a Belgian Christian. At the time, these were not taken. But, as long as they were in the house, they were not going to miss anyone. Mother did not open her door until the Germans threatened to break it down. Poldi assured me that when mother opened the door the Nazis were actually polite! They did not beat her nor did they question her. They even gave her permission to take her sewing case to a neighbor downstairs, when she told them it belonged to her. This was not true, and I can only imagine that mother wanted us to have it. (I still have the scissors that were in the case.)

According to Poldi, mother was quiet and composed. When the Germans left with her, the old drunk on the first floor, under the influence of rum, as always, allegedly mistook the

Germans for burglars and jumped one of them. His condition saved his life. (I never understood how this unemployed slob managed to buy a bottle of rum each and every day.)

Before taking off, the servants of the Third Reich, arrested yet another Jewish woman a few houses further down the street. That one was beaten because she would or could not tell where her children were when questioned about them.

Poldi told me yet, that a transport was to leave the Dossin camp in Malines, in two days and suggested I might send a package of food there for mother. (Mother did leave on the 15th of January 1944 on a transport of 3000 women to Auschwitz. It seems over 1000 perished on the trip. Less than 50 survived the camp. I talked to the 29 I was able to locate after the war. Showed them a photo of mother. Only one insisted that she remembered seeing her. According to that witness, mother worked in a brick-making compound. She claimed this was all she knew about mother.)

Useless to say, I was quite besides myself when I left Poldi. At mother's door I read the seal again then tore it off and let myself in with the key I had. Poldi heard me and came running. "Jesus almighty!", she lamented, "have you lost your mind? What are you doing?" I did not bother to answer.

The kitchen was dark, it's window blacked out. I removed my shoes to keep the people downstairs from hearing me. My flashlight glid over the familiar interior. Everything seemed exactly as it had been when I was there hours earlier. Only the piece of bread that had been on the table the night before was gone. Mother probably had taken it with her.

Poldi, her shoes also off, had tip-toed behind me into the bedroom. The bed looked as if it had been hastily left. The pillow still wore the imprint of my mother's head, and I wondered bitterly how often she might have hoped for rest on it in vain. The closet revealed that mother had put on her best dress. A dark blue one with a dark red design. On the bottom of the closet was mother's food supply. Two packages of macaroni, some salt, and a package of bouillon cubes.

"Take it!" Poldi advised. She had already picked up some objects. "There is no use leaving anything for the Germans we don't have to leave."

Clothing, bedding, silver ware, kitchen utensils, and so on, we carried to Poldi's. In the kitchen cabinet I found two purses. One contained 300 francs, ($ 8.00) and some papers. The other was full of small change. I handed everything to Poldi. Later we could sort things out. The papers I had found in the one purse, however, I put in my pocket. We were in a hurry, and as soon as we thought that we had taken everything of any value, we hastily straightened the place out. Then I locked the door and pasted the seal back into place.

The remainder of the day I spent putting a package together. It took a lot of running around as everything was difficult to find. Bread, cold cuts, salt, fat, chocolate and lemonade. It took all the money I had plus the 300 francs. Of course, there was no guarantee that mother would get any of it.

In the evening, I phoned Andrée and asked her to come to my place and help me pack what I had for mother in a suitcase. Then I went to my room, put all the stuff I had for mother on my bed, looked at it and cried bitterly.

The next morning, I delivered the suitcase to the "Jewish Community Center". There were small things in it, that would let mother know I had been in the apartment, should she get them.

For several days I sat in my mansard unable to do anything but feel helpless, bitter and a new emotion: hate.

Without funds, I could not buy any food, but Andrée kept bringing me something to eat when she visited me in the evening. Although quite saddened herself, she tried to cheer me. She had located a phonograph with some American record which could be obtained for a thousand francs, and thought I should have it. She also notified the Dirkxs of mother's arrest. I did not have the courage to face these good people, and their sympathy.

Poldi told me later that the Germans returned the day after the arrest to empty the apartment. She also remembered that mother had signaled her at a moment when the Nazis had their back turned to her, but she had not understood what she tried to say.

Of the things we had taken from the apartment, I kept two cooking pots, and the purse that had contained mother's small change as well as her ration card. Poldi had helped herself to the small change but I did not say anything. I gave her all the coal that was in the basement. There I also found an iron box that contained letters from relatives in the United States and from my father. I hid those with the papers and photos I had in the floor of my mansard.

Slowly I got used to the idea that mother was gone, that I had been unable to prevent it, and that nothing at all could be done about it. The experience had left me more indifferent and cynical than I had been and had taught me to hate. I must not have been very pleasant, but Andrée suffered me patiently. I did not get along with her as well as I used to, and visits by Anne, who now and then wanted to see that I was alright, did not help.

Fortunately, I was snowed under with work, and was so absorbed by it, that a visitor made herself only known when she knocked on the door. I was no longer listening to the slightest noise downstairs.

At times, the landlord lent me his old phonograph and a few old records, but before long, I bought the machine Andrée had found for me. It was almost new, and I enjoyed tremendously the few American records that came with it. Also, there were a couple of French military marches which managed to arouse me from my apathy. When I listened to their energetic beat, the Russians seemed to move closer to Auschwitz faster, while the Allies in Italy and on the other side of the Channel seemed to snore less loudly. Checking the front lines on my map, I speculated hopefully on future developments.

Within arm's reach, next to my bed, I kept a "Molotov" cocktail and a heavy hammer. Having abandoned earlier plans for escape, I sort of half wished the Gestapo would try to take me. Better an end with terror than a terror with no end was my latest motto.

The lady in black, who had visited me at Christmas, kept me supplied with the latest editions of the "L'Insoumis". Her last name was Thirifays. She and her husband, a former government clerk and army officer, lived very close to my place. I had been to their home, and had taken them into my confidence, believing that I had nothing to fear from them and that it could not hurt to have more friends nearby.

I made a list of Belgian Nazis I happen to know of, (Rexists), and gave it to the Thirifays for the underground. These people were checked out and I had the satisfaction to see their names published in the "L'Insoumis" in a column devoted to traitors and to a warning to citizens.

When I visited the Dirkxs again, Madam cried and Monsieur stated with a sigh, that somehow we should have found shelter for my mother. I was surprised and hurt by that remark, but what good would it have done to remind my friends I had talked about a hiding place for my mother more than once? Other friends now also said, they did not understand why mother had not been in hiding. Those were the very ones I had beseeched on her behalf.

I was allowed to write a letter to Margit each month. It was forwarded to her somehow by the Jakobs. In those letters I sent her ration stamps with greetings and love from her parents, and told her that we were all well.

Our real IDs, the ones that identified us as stateless Jews, (see page 58 of the original diary), had to be taken to the magistrate downtown every six month to be revalidated. Without these IDs we could not receive our ration stamps and would have to obtain all our food on the black market. Unfortunately, I was not well off enough to get along without rations.

Anyway, as long as the IDs were valid, Poldi fetched the ration stamps for us each month when she got hers. But, one had to appear in person to have the IDs revalidated.

The time had come for me to do so, and it so happened that Andrée was free to go with me. Early in the morning we had taken a streetcar to get downtown. When we passed the railway station, *la Gare du Nord*, I suddenly had an unbearable pain in my throat. It was so bad, we had to get off the streetcar and hasten to the nearest eating place where I bought a bowl of hot "soup". As I slowly drank the watery substance, the pain left as suddenly as it had come.

We continued on foot to the Food Control Center which was not very far from the railway station. Less than fifty feet from the building, I grabbed Andrée by her arm and turned her toward a storefront. Two black sedans had just pulled to a screeching halt in front of the building we were heading for. A dozen Gestapo agents poured from the cars as if they were on fire, and drawing their pistols rushed into the building. At that very moment an army truck arrived and spewed forth some twenty MPs, armed to their teeth, who followed the Gestapo inside with the exception of two, who brandishing hand machine-guns posted themselves at the entrance.

If it were not for my sudden and inexplicable sore throat, we would have been inside the building now. Instead, watching the proceedings from across the street, we decided not to wait for further developments, postponed the revalidation of my ID and went home.

Andrée, Ernst and I had been sitting in my room listening to the phonograph, playing the same few records I had, for the x-teenth time. We loved the music, but after a while repetition eroded their charm.

Now, Andrée suggested that we should go to her place and have some hot chocolate. Ernst jumped with excitement at the idea, and it certainly appealed to me, but I did express some concern about Andrée's employers.

Well, there was no reason to worry, because on this Sunday they had gone to visit his father for an afternoon of bridge which was surely going to keep them away till late in the evening.

Soon we had smuggled ourselves into the building and were sitting in the Baron's fine kitchen while Andrée was making her brew. I indulged in a cigarette and joined Ernst in the living room to help him locate the BBC on the beautiful radio there. Then we sat at the sun-caressed kitchen table, munching cake and sipping hot chocolate as if it were some rare champagne.

Andrée was happy. We had a pretty good day together, and I had just promised her to drink at least ten cups of chocolate, but before I had done the first one in, we heard keys in the front door.

Andrée had more gumption than even I suspected. By the time I had jumped up, the cake had already disappeared. Ernst and I had grabbed our cups and saucers and ran tip-toe onto the kitchen balcony. Andrée pointed to a door at the right end of the balcony and took off to meet her employers who by now were in the hallway. If they would have come directly to the kitchen, they would have seen us. However, we did not waste any time getting through the shelter-promising door and found ourselves in a toilet. The door locked, we hastily but philosophically finished our hot chocolate before we gave any serious thoughts to our predicament. Our immediate hope was that neither the baron nor the baroness would suffer the need to use our retreat. We agreed that on this the future of the three of us depended. Then we agreed that all we could do was wait.

Soon there was a soft rap on the door. We opened cautiously. It was Andrée asking us if we wanted more cake and without waiting for a reply pushed some into our hands. We locked ourselves back in, and got the cake to its proper destination. After that we had little time to wonder about our next move, because Andrée was back. It seems that the de Heels were in the living room and "all we had to do" was to walk out quietly.

Andrée preceded us, walked into the living room and engaged her employers in a lively conversation. Ernst and I tip-toed by through the hallway towards the front door. I softly opened it, counting on the silent cooperation of the dog. Tiphram did not disappoint me. Andrée had seen to it that the elevator was waiting for us, and once inside and moving down, we took a deep breath of relief. But, we had rejoiced too soon, for to our dismay the elevator got stuck between the second and the first floor. Frantically we pushed various buttons, except the alarm of course, and the contraption finally moved on.

But now we failed to stop at the first floor and continued on to the basement. The door opened and we found ourselves face to face with the concierge who eyed us suspiciously. I explained that the elevator had acted strangely, but he interrupted me and asked harshly where we came from. I wanted to say that we had visited the Gestapo agent, but instead told the truth; we had come from the de Heels. Fortunately, Andrée appeared in the staircase at that moment and wrapped the cantankerous concierge in a friendly conversation which allowed us a graceful exit.

On the 23rd. of February 1944, I received the unexpected visit of Bertha Dirkx. She had heard that I had the grippe. Also it had been a while since I had visited them. She was pleased to find that I had a stove and did not seem to suffer from hunger. According to her, the war was just about over. Listening to the BBC every day, she knew that everything was going well, better than most non-listeners realized. Also, Emil was recovering nicely. His doctor thought that eventually no trace would remain of his terrible fall from the tree.

Her visit did cheer me. I promised to call on them soon.

I tried to discourage her, but Anne visited me regularly now. She came on her way home from work and only stayed a few minutes, but Andrée made some nasty scenes about it. I tried to explain that I could not possibly throw Anne out.

The cold winter seemed endless. Its usually gray sky was rarely disturbed by the friendly growl of Allied planes. There were days when I had little to eat. I was not suffering from hunger, I got migraine-like headaches instead.

Whatever else was in the future, spring was not far away.

I visited the Dirkxs on the 27th., and on that day saw Emil again. He arrived as I was leaving and proposed a walk through the nearby park Josephat.

Emil, walking slowly, leaning on a cane, stopped frequently to rest and to poke nervously the ground at his feet. Neither of us seemed to know what to say to pick up the pieces of our friendship, dropped so unceremoniously so many month earlier.

Our silence was awkward, the park gray, misty, wintry and cold. Eventually, one word engendered another. We began to talk, obviously relieved to be able to do so. While in the hospital, Emil had thought of me and had been disappointed that I had failed to visit him.

I apologized, told him that I had often thought of him, had wanted to visit him, but had felt less than welcome.

As it was, we had kept informed of each other through Mr. Dirkx.

News of my mother's arrest had pained Emil much. He was very fond of mother, and I was moved by his pain and sincerity when he spoke of her.

He did not look good. His features were rather translucent, his eyes glowed feverishly. His voice was weak. Speaking was obviously an effort for him. He had been at the hospital of Etterbeek when it was bombed by the Americans. I had not known that, and he told me briefly about his experience there.

Recently, he became romantically involved with the nurse who had taken care of him. "Almost engaged", he smiled: "Of course, father is against it!"

We did not mention Andrée.

Andrée was not feeling well. She was in bed with what appeared to be liver trouble and was being nursed by the baroness. Under the circumstances, I could not communicate with her, was worried about her and missed her.

Two days after our walk in the park, Emil and I met again. This time I gave him a book I had just read: "Barbara" by Franz Werfel. In the past, we often lent books to each other and discussed them after we both read them.

I visited Simon Kaplan, Ernst's dad and Margit's uncle, who lived with his mother on the top floor, the fourth floor, in the house where Lintschi lived on the third. Rarely did I visit him, or Lintschi, because being with them was quite depressing to me. Their flat, poorly furnished, unaired and poorly kept, could at best be described as dismal. In constant fear, they hardly dared poke their noses outside.

On my way home, I noticed a large Red Cross flag, fluttering fitfully in the wind on the facade of the Red Cross building on the rue Royale, across the street from the Botanical Garden. I had heard that it was possible to send short personal telegrams overseas from there.

For a moment I hesitated. Maybe this was just another fiendish trap? Looking carefully about, I could not detect anything suspicious, and promising myself to be careful about the information I would give, I went inside.

It seemed the rumor about sending messages was true. The attending lady in gray handed me a sheet on which I was to write fifteen words. I addressed the message to aunt Mina in New York, mother's sister, whose address I knew by heart and listed the first names of those no longer with us, then those who still were. I gave our old address as mine, just in case the Germans should want to trace me. Of course, I was not convinced the telegram would reach its destination. Much later, I found out that it did.

I don't know why Mrs. Thirifays always wore black. Maybe it was her favored color, or it could be that she was in mourning. Her penchant for black was not shared by her husband. He preferred gray suits and usually wore a tie, even though he was retired and not going out much. Their home was only about one block from my place. I visited them occasionally, and now they warned me to stay away. The publishers of "L'Insoumis" had been arrested by the Germans. There was a chance the Thirifays were being watched. They would let me know when they felt safe again.

Andrée had recovered from her illness. On the third of March, having been granted a few days vacation, she left for Wayaux to be with her family. Although I was invited, I did not feel like going, but promised that I would accompany her to be at the baptism of the baby that was expected soon by her mother.

Maybe it would have been good for my morale to go to the country, because my morale was at an all-time low. People expected significant events and business slowed. In the past, I had not been affected by public moods, but now suddenly, I was almost out of work. Demand for hand decorated lamp shades and hankies had collapsed.

The BBC promised a second front, a promise that had been made before. But the German-controlled press was noticeable nervous, and that was certainly a good sign. Anyway, one of the consequences of this tension was that I was going rapidly broke.

I had no ration stamps now, was short of food, cigarettes, and could not buy coke for the stove. That it was getting warmer, that Spring was around the corner, was barely comforting.

The lady who lived under me, on the second floor, was on passable terms with me now. She insisted on lending me books, and as I had more time on my hands, I engrossed myself in these cheap novels.

Returning on the 8th. of March, Andrée looked perfectly healthy again.

On the evening of the next day, I set out to deliver one hundred silk hankies decorated with Allied flags and slogans, such as: "Finally Free!" "Long live the Allies!" I had sworn off these patriotic imprudence, but business being what it was, I could not be so choosy.

I went on foot. It was getting dark when I approached the military compound on the Dailly Square by way of the Chaussee de Louvain. Near the square I hesitated. For the flicker of a moment I thought I saw something gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun. Sure enough, German MPs, some sixty feet ahead of me, had emerged from the shelter of a doorway to stop a man. While they searched his briefcase, I turned, and with my suitcase walked slowly across the street into the next side street for a little detour.

On Saturday, the eleventh, I set out to visit Therese. I had not seen her since Lillian left for Naples. Therese had many connections in the business. She had been generous in helping me locate work before, and I hoped she would be able to help me again.

It was Andrée's day off. I met her at the streetcar terminal at the Queen Astrid park. From there we walked the few blocks to the apartment where Therese lived with her husband and her mother. She received us warmly, and we had a nice chat. But, as it happened she too had little work now. She did, however, give me the address of a button maker. Button decorators were still in demand. Unfortunately, this one was located in Laeken, about as far as one could be from where I lived.

On the way home, we passed a small cinema where the motion picture "Chain Busters" was shown. Andrée got excited, because this movie was supposed to be great. I had not been to the movies in ages. Well, here we were in a sleepy suburb, were we should be quite safe. So, we got off the streetcar to see Chain Busters.

This was Saturday afternoon and the cinema was packed. Fortunately, we arrived at the intermission and found good seats in the center of a row towards the back of the theater. Pleased with the rare occasion and Andrée's happy mood, I hummed along with the jazz that entertained the audience between showings.

Suddenly, the rippling noises of the crowd around us turned into a stony silence. I looked up in wonder and noticed that most people were staring sullenly towards the entrance instead of towards the screen. I turned to follow their eyes, then whispered to Andrée, "Indeed a quiet cinema! Only four Gestapo agents and half a dozen MPs."

Andrée, who had not noticed yet, was startled. Her hands locked around my arm. What now? Get up and walk to the toilet? Too risky. I would only focus attention on myself. Better sit tight and see. While I watched the Germans from the corners of my eyes, I repeated the data of my false ID to myself.

I had not shaved in two days because I was just getting over the grippe which had made my face tender. How stupid! How could I expect to look eighteen? MPs had posted themselves at the exits. Two followed the Gestapo agents who walked slowly along the rows and abruptly called on spectators for identification. They were obviously after the young. Those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were supposed to be working in Germany. And, of course, they were always looking for Jews.

Several fellows had already been arrested when one agent reached our row. I tried to look casual and sure of myself while my heart pounded furiously. But to my great relief my voice was calm when I whispered to Andrée, at my right, to remain cool.

Next to her sat an elderly lady. Then a young man, about my age, who had turned very pale. Next there were a few more people, then a man at the end of the row whose papers were being examined. The Gestapist handed the paper back to the man and let his eyes glide inquisitively over us. I was grateful for sitting in the very center of the row. But not for long, for the Nazi pushed his way towards me.

He halted at the pale young man and demanded his papers. Damn it! His French was impeccable. If he were French he would detect my accent for sure!

Looking at the boy's papers, he asked him some questions. The fellow stuttered helplessly. A signal, and already, a MP took him away.

The lady next to the boy burst into tears and insisted on going along. The large, raincoat clad Nazi obliged her then turned to me, leering at me like a cat at a mouse. A felt hat obscured his features under the subdues overhead lights. As he reached me, I calmly handed him my ID. His eyes boring through me, he asked in a raspy German where I lived. Ha! I wasn't going to fall for that one! But my heart missed a beat or two. He must have suspected the refugee in me.

I smiled and retorted in French: "I beg your pardon?"

"Where do you live!" This time his voice rose to the hated German crescendo and no one looked in our direction anymore.

I shrugged, "I am sorry, but I don't understand German."

At this point, a young woman who sat in front of me, turned around and said, "The gentleman asked you where you live."

"I thank you Madame," I said gratefully, "Unfortunately, I don't understand German." (The woman and others around us must have known from my accent, faint as it may have been, that I did.) For the moment the Nazi seemed convinced and repeated his question in French. I nodded and pointed politely to the card he held: "My address is on my paper."

"I know, I know!" he hollered, "I want *you* to tell me anyway!"

I told him. "I see," he muttered, "so you are from Charleroi?"

The lights went out and the movie started. He promptly produced a flashlight and danced its beam between my ID and my eyes.

"What is your age?... Where were you born?...How long have you lived in Charleroi?...Where were you born?...How long have you lived in Antwerp?"

Each question was accompanied by at least one grunt. By now I was sure that the ID was good. It had to be to survive the minute examination by an expert. "What are you doing in Brussels?" His voice boomed in competition with the movie's soundtrack. I explained that I was a student at the academy and that classes were held only till noon on Saturdays, and that I had decided to see the movie.

Andrée was nervous and fidgety. She tried to help by volunteering whispered information about the progress of the movie's plot.

Knowing that my student card was not perfect, I had not handed it to the Nazi. Now he wanted to see it. And, of course, he spotted the corrected error at once. "Aha!" he hollered gleefully, this card is falsified."

"Falsified?" I asked incredulously, "How can you say such a thing?"

If I didn't sound convincing now, I was at the end of my rope.

"Falsified? That's impossible! You know those are issued by the police. Surely you know the stamp!"

He seemed unsure. "In any case, this card is not right."

"If you say so." I said indignantly, " I will take it back and complain."

As he grunted to this, the thought streaked to my mind that the last train for Charleroi left an hour ago. Had he read my mind, or had I read his? Anyway, he now asked coyly where I planned on spending the night since there were no more trains for Charleroi.

Andrée answered for me, "He will spend the night with me, of course." She had to say this loudly to overcome the sound system, and even though the cursed flashlight was blinding me, I was sure she blushed. The flashlight jumped to Andrée's face. "And who are you?" he hissed.

Andrée had her ID ready. It was from Brussels, but showed her a native of Charleroi. "I am his fiancée." He handed her card back.

I had hoped that this would be the end of it, but it was not. He repeated questions and restated his doubts about the student card.

In the meantime, there had been more arrests elsewhere in the theater. Even though it was dark, and I was quite blinded by the flashlight, I noticed that the hunters were holding their search. Maybe their quota was filled or maybe their cars. My interrogator hesitated. Then suddenly and reluctantly he handed me my ID and removed his threatening bulk from our life.

Andrée wanted to leave right then, but I thought it better to stay on, see the rest of the "Chain Buster" and calm down.

Well, the "Chain Buster" turned out to be one of the silliest “busts” ever put on cellophane, and the audience the quietest I ever sat with.

From the cinema we went to the de Heel's apartment, the latter being gone for the weekend. I suppose that most people who had such a close call as I had that day, are in an exalted mood for having survived. We certainly were, and the feast of French fries and mixed salad Andrée prepared was among the best meals I ever ate. We consumed it happily in the lovely dining room, listening to music on the radio.

Poldi told me she had heard that my mother had a nervous breakdown while waiting in the basement of the Gestapo building on the Avenue Louise to be transferred to the barracks of Dossin in Malines. Allegedly, a doctor had been summoned. Supposedly, on rare occasions, the doctor was able to have a person released. But, he did not even get a chance to examine mother, because he shut the door behind him when he entered the detention cell. Apparently, that was a violation of some rule and the guards dismissed him at once.

How or where Poldi got the story I don't know. It did not matter now. Mother was gone. She was in the hands of the Nazis. That was a fact I had to live with.

The course of life often depends on small circumstances and sometimes on only one move or word. Turn right or left, say yes or no, and your entire existence is changed. Something to think about.

Andrée's sister Valentine came to Brussels on Tuesday the 14th of March, with the good news that a healthy baby girl had been born to the Castins. It so happened that Ernst visited me that day. Valentine stayed with Andrée, Ernst stayed with me a couple of days.

On the 18th., Andrée, Valentine and I left for Wayaux to be there for the baby's baptism. The trip was uneventful, but the train was considerably behind schedule when it arrived at Gosselis where we got off.

The Nazis had become strict at enforcing the curfew. Knowing that the train was very late, we obtained a piece of paper to that effect from a station master at Courselles Motte, shortly before we arrived at our destination.

There were no more streetcars and we had no choice but to get to Wayaux on foot! The night was so black, one could not see one's hand in front of one's face. Hoping we were headed in the right direction, I told stories to make the time pass and to keep our minds off our tired feet. We had been on them all day long.

We were out in the open country, had not gone very far, when we were stopped by a flashlight someone stuck under my nose.

"Halt! Who goes there!" This in French. Startled out of our wits, we froze and gulped for air. We had run into two "Black shirts", Belgian Nazis, who patrolled roads at night.

The piece of paper from the station master and our explanation of the late train satisfied these "Rexists" quickly. They sent us on our way without even asking so see our IDs. Apparently, we were not who they were looking for.

At Wayaux, the Castins had been waiting up for us, and there was a friendly reunion. But, the atmosphere was changed, or perhaps I was. Somehow the very warm rapport that had existed during my earlier visit failed to materialize.

The baby was baptized Nicole, on the 19th., which was also my sister's birthday. She was sixteen that day. Not wanting to attract attention, especially after I heard that the nosy neighbor, the one who wanted Andrée married into her family, kept asking questions about me, I didn't attend the religious service.

Aimé became godfather. He had offered me the honor for a mere five francs, but I didn't have the change, and Aimé probably considered me a poor credit risk.

In the evening, Andrée and I visited her former teacher, a friendly middle-aged lady who lived in a friendly small house. Then the next morning, while the village still slept, we left for Brussels in the company of Valentine, who traveled with us as far as Gosselis where she worked.

I met with Emil almost regularly now, but Andrée didn't like this renewed friendship anymore than she liked occasional visits from Anne. Under the pressure of her constant nagging, our relationship cooled slowly. And, to be in the company of Anne became rather pleasant. I had talked to Emil about this situation often enough, but we didn't know what to do, and neither I nor he mentioned anything to Anne. The latter, never the-less, seemed to sense the problem she caused. Her visits became rarer and rarer.

Emil's frequent visits and work kept me going that Spring. I tried to ignore the possibility that his visits could arouse unwanted attention. After all, he could have been calling on anyone in the house. In the streets, Emil was quite safe. Walking with a cane, he was an invalid, of no use to the Germans. True, he still was stopped occasionally because he looked Jewish, but he was not, could prove it, and was never arrested.

"Filco", the button manufacturer recommended to me by Therese, provided me with work. The buttons to be decorated were already sewn to cardboards by the dozen, and were a bulky lot to carry. It took a large suitcase to transport them. Then, "Filco" was near an enormous railway depot where German security agents were bound to be active. Also, I fancied the depot a target for Allied bombers and felt uneasy to be near it. I did admire the people who worked in target areas, day in and day out, like Walter, who continued to work at the airport.

Anyway, I needed the work.

In the meantime, the Germans had dropped pretenses at civilized behavior. Executions of patriots, and of those who somehow offended them had become common occurrences.

A vast number of innocent citizens, usually people of some repute, such as writers, professors, politicians, were kept in prisons for reprisal purposes. For each German killed, ten of these hostages were executed.

There were also executions in reprisal for acts of sabotage. These killings were supposed to keep revolt in check. Anti-German activity did increase and so did reprisals. The list of the executed posted on the walls of government buildings became longer and longer.

On the 30th. of March, Doctor Fred Thys, chief of the St. Peters Hospital was executed after having spent eight month in the Breendock concentration camp. "For having treated Jewish children and having contributed to the escape of some Jews who had been confined to the hospital by the Germans."

On the 10th. of April (1944), early in the morning, I delivered a load of buttons. On the way back, I passed the Thirifays' home just as Monsieur stepped outside. It was a beautiful, limpid day, which after a long and dismal Winter is so welcome. We greeted each other, and I was asked in for a cup of "coffee". To have breakfast was a special treat for me, and I accepted gladly. Madame expressed her pleasure at the warm sunshine, and Monsieur tried to provide me with reasons for a renewed hope. Apparently, the Allies were waiting for weather like we were having to crush the Germans once and for all.

Because I voiced some skepticism, I was brought up to date on developments on various battlefronts and on the bombing of Germany. Rubbing his hands excitedly, Mr. Thirifays concluded that an Allied landing in the West was about to happen. Everything pointed to this so ardently hoped for event. No doubt, this was the right time. To erase the last vestiges of my doubts, Madame reminded me that Monsieur had been an officer during W.W.I, and that his learned opinion was not without merit.

"Listen, listen! Maybe they are coming already!"

Indeed air raid warning sirens were wailing and already the sky was crowded with a roaring, howling fury of planes.

The bombers were low, and circling over the city they gave up some more altitude. No doubt, these large overlapping formations had us in mind.

My host, illegal field glasses in hand, attempted to count the planes, but he could not. It did not take field glasses to distinguish three types of aircraft in action, and to appreciate the disciplined, tight, perfect formations, maneuvering bravely through dense pattern of furious anti-aircraft fire.

Momentarily the sun reflected blindingly off the shiny machines, then again these streaked as black shadows against the light-filled sky.

Madame did not dare to step into the street, but Monsieur laughed and told me, as an old warrior he did not know fear.

Occasionally the shooting subsided, and we could hear the elderly couple who lived upstairs calling on Jesus and Marie.

A brilliant, small spherical object detached itself from one of the bombers, and leaving a bright white tail behind, curved gracefully through the sky towards the ground. It must have been a signal, or marker, for now all hell broke loose. Bombs were howling down, exploding in vicious, deafening thunderclaps. Sudden air pressure pressed against my chest, cutting my breath, making me feel feather-light for a moment. Tremors rippled through the ground, climbed the walls of buildings.

In-between explosions there were more meek calls for Jesus and Marie from upstairs, and Mr. Thirifays shouting "Don't fear, don't fear, it's all over!"

But "over" was already drowned by more explosions. They came closer. Rushing to earth, bombs sounded more and more like express trains racing through tunnels. The closer they came, the shorter the tunnel. Now some exploded close enough to push us against the building, cutting our breath with air pressure that was hot. My host turned pale and rushed into the house. The next one came so fast it overlapped the short falling roar. I did not have time to run into the house, I was blown inside and was surprised to find myself on my feet.

"Oh, dear Marie, dear mother of God," came the mournful cry from upstairs.

Monsieur had taken a hold of himself: " Alright, alright! It's all over!"

It was not all over, but the bombs that followed fell at a considerable distance from us.

Those that had fallen closest, had peppered the large lawn and square in front of the Woluve St. Lambert city hall which was six blocks from the Thirifays' home and three blocks from Andrée's. Numerous windows had been broken in *her* apartment building.

Although this bombing had not lacked in forcefulness, the Allies did not open a second front that morning. Yet, we found out quickly, that they meant to make up vigorously for the Winter's lull. There were many mistakes made by the bombers, and there were many tragedies. The Germans emphasized losses incurred by the civilian population. In pictures and words they delved on the brutality of the Allies. Yet, people prayed for more, believing that each bomb brought us nearer to freedom, and that freedom had its price.

On Saturday, the 22nd. of April, some damaged British bombers came flying low over Brussels, trying to make their way home, and anti-aircraft fire brought one down. Later in the afternoon, a huge armada, perhaps a thousand planes, came back from their mission by way of Brussels. It was the first time they had chosen this path during day time. Their long passage brought everything to a standstill. There was no anti-aircraft action, and the excitement caused by the stunning view of the endless formations in the sky, and the considerable roar of their engines, brought the population to the brink of open joy.

On the 23rd., Emil introduced us to his fiancée Lillian, his former nurse. They, Andrée and I, took the streetcar to Stockel to visit the site of Emil's accident. I took the box camera along aunt Mina had given me in Vienna for my Bar Mitzwa in 1937, and to which I had somehow managed to hold on, and we took several pictures. (See original diary, pages 207-208.)

On Tuesday, May 2nd., early in the afternoon, someone knocked softly on my door. I knew the footsteps and the rapping of those who came to visit me, but this one I did not know. It was my sister Margit. In her hands she held a bouquet of Lilies of the Valley: "Good day and happy birthday!"

Surprise! I wonder if Margit could tell how shocked I was.

We embraced. "Wow, what are you doing in Brussels? How did you get to my place?"

"Gee, I only wanted to visit you, and mama and papa!"

I ignored her explanation and instead reproached her for her recklessness. She told me that she came in good company, and that it had been such a long time since she had seen her parents.

I remained silent while she talked and uncertainty came into her voice. Finally, she sat down and looked at me fearfully.

Some happy birthday! Some surprise! I had to tell her now that she won't be able to see her parents again.

"Many people have been arrested and deported," I said slowly, "It's very bad. I don't understand why they took a chance bringing you to the city to risk your life so foolishly. Be happy that you are in a safe place in the Ardennes. Eventually the war will be over, and perhaps things will work out so that we will all be together again."

Margit began to understand and her eyes filled with tears. Her body stiffened and her lips quivered: "Where is daddy?" she wanted to know.

I did not answer and she cried quietly. Then after a few minutes had gone their miserable way, "Where is mother?" she asked hysterically.

I shook my head: "Don't cry, Margit, don't cry," I said to say something. But, of course, she cried and sobbed, and the sun, falling through the small square window in the roof, picked out dust particles and let them glimmer for a moment before they returned to the shadows.

"Take your coat," I said finally, "I want you to meet some friends." She obeyed silently and we left. On the way to the Thirifays, Margit dried her tears while I hoped that the visit might distract her.

After I had introduced Margit, we were treated to "coffee" and "cake", as well as to an insight into the latest Allied victories. As had happened on my previous visit, Monsieur's account was interrupted by an air raid alert.

Madame took due notice of this coincidence: "When ever you stop by, there is an alert."

A large number of flying fortresses passed in tight formations over the city. They were just passing, apparently returning from a mission. Some bombs did explode in the distance, hardly audible over the infernal din of roaring engines and anti-aircraft fire.

We watched from the back porch of the house. Behind it, in a small walled garden, two chickens and a rooster, were nervously cackling and running around in circles.

All this excitement was perfect for Margit. By the time it was over, and we returned to my place, she had regained her composure. I hoped to keep her mind off the tragic news she had received by involving her in a discussion concerning the possibility of moving to the Ardennes myself. The idea just popped into my mind then. I suggested that Margit might inquire of her friends what my chances were, and she promised to let me know the very next day what they thought.

Shortly after Margit left, Emil and his fiancée Lillian came to wish me a happy birthday. They gave me two wonderful books on art history. Right on their heels came Andrée who brought me three books on ancient art, a piece of cake and an egg. In my excitement, I dropped the egg. But its yoke didn't break and I saved most of it in a glass. Then I made "coffee" on the stove especially lit for the occasion, and later, huddled around my table, we consumed the goodies.

Margit's visit had exhausted me. Of course I told my friends about it, and then we also talked about the war. And fortunately, I thought of taking a photograph to commemorate the occasion, for as the French so aptly say, *'one is not twenty every day'*.

Emil and Lillian were enthusiastic about the idea I had of seeking refuge in the Ardennes. Andrée, however, was skeptical, suggesting that one could hardly know where one would be better off these days. But, she also said that I should go if the opportunity presented itself, and if I thought it was the right thing for me to do.

Margit returned the next day with the news that I could go. I should take one suitcase with whatever I deemed necessary and be at the St. Croix square early the next morning. This afternoon, I was to meet the man who was to go with us. I was overcome with joy. Finally, I could get away from this hiding place of mine, where I was no longer comfortable, where I felt no longer safe. In the Ardennes there was the "underground". Maybe I would have a chance to join them. There was bound to be more food, fresh air and no Gestapo.

No sooner had I started to pack, when the sirens howled. We climbed on the table and marveled at the tight formation of flying fortresses in the clear sky. Again, they seemed to be on their way back from a mission. Several formations contained less than the customary fifteen planes. In one I counted nine, in another only five! Why on earth did they fly so close together and at such a low altitude? The anti-aircraft batteries barked like mad iron dogs at their gorgeous targets. They were not particularly known for hitting anything, but how could they miss?

This time they didn't. Two planes were hit simultaneously. One lost its tail, the other got it in its nose. Within a few seconds, the first had dived to the ground and exploded, apparently with all men aboard. The other, seemingly on fire, lost altitude rapidly, trailing black smoke. Its engines screamed desperately for some moments. Then they were silent as the plane disappeared behind rooftops. We listened fearfully for an explosion which came in a moment. Now there were three parachutes in the sky, men dangling from them. It seemed they would land near us.

In the meantime, the Germans encouraged by their rare success, eagerly continued their barrage.

The streets were suddenly crowded with people running to meet the flyers descending on their parachutes. Margit and I were in the throng.

What could happen? Surrounded by the excited wave of humanity we felt quite safe. Let them try to arrest all of us.

Arrived at the huge open field behind the Tir National, the throng slowed. The Americans had come down somewhere in the field, and the people joyfully shouting advanced to greet them. What a welcome - unless, of course, the aviators thought the mob had come to lynch them?

An old jalopy, its tinny horn honking comically, pierced the dense crowd. A civilian in its open door shouted on the top of his voice for room. The mud-covered license plate was illegible. The vehicle halted at the edge of the field and degorged two men who pushed their way through the cooperating mass of spectators. It seemed to me I saw the barrel of a gun. Anyway, these people were not Germans.

But Germans were not far behind. They approached slowly on a large green bus. Their progress was practically nil in spite of a frenzied screaming and gesticulating officer prancing on the roof of the bus, intermittently looking for the Americans with enormous field glasses.

Inside the bus were some nervous German airmen.

Now, the two civilians came back, dragging a leather jacketed American. The man was large and obviously wounded, and the civilians had difficulties running with him. But already, the little car had swallowed them up and they were gone. All this within sight of the Germans, who now, frustrated, opened fire. Maybe they were just shooting into the air, but no one was waiting to find out. Panic stricken, the crowd scattered in all directions. Through the void thusly created, a black Gestapo sedan came screeching into the scene. I grabbed Margit by the arm and we did our best to keep up with the running crowd.

Out from nowhere, a haggard man appeared on a bicycle. He was yelling about Germans beating bystanders and arresting whoever they could lay their hands on. Moments later, a second carload of Gestapo sped by in the direction of the field. Through the rolled-down car windows glared the ugly faces of Germany's finest.

Overhead the armada flew on without further incidents. The crowd disappeared from the street. Rumors had it that some people had been killed, some beaten and arrested. One American had escaped.

Later that day, Margit took me to the sister in-law of a certain Colonel Charles Henry, who was supposed to be an important man in the Ardennes. This was the man who wanted to meet me, and while we waited for him, his sister in-law, who according to my sister was a very strict Catholic, had many questions to ask of me.

Finally, the Colonel arrived. He was a smallish but broad man in whose light skinned, wide face two clear blue eyes twinkled rather mischievously. His voice was high and hard, but not metallic. His bearing, definitely military, even though his wooden leg and cane interfered with his gestures, and the habit he had of walking to and fro while talking.

After examining my false papers carefully, he told me that he was going to take me to the Ardennes with him. I could get work on a farm where I would be safe and well cared for.

"Rather than meeting us at the place St. Croix, be here at six a.m. tomorrow."

At the appointed time, I arrived with Andrée, who had received permission from the Colonel and from her employers to accompany us to the railway station.

Andrée carried my suitcase, Margit her own, and I the Colonel's. His was incredibly heavy. We hurried the best we could, through the yet lifeless streets, to get to a 6:50 train on time. It was warm. Perspiring profusely under our loads, we were not about to set any speed records. Of course, the Colonel could only walk so fast. Anyway, he was very talkative. As I walked by his side, he told me that he came to Brussels rather regularly to fetch food rations for his family: his wife, two sons and one daughter. For even though they lived in the Ardennes, they kept their official residence in Brussels.

He advised me, that if I happen to remember the street where his sister in-law lived, I promptly forget it.

Arrived at the railway station just in time for the train's departure, Andrée and I took leave from each other rather hastily. I promised to write as often as feasible, while we shoved our way onto the crowded train, leaving her on the quay.

Being a war casualty, the Colonel had a permanent railway pass, entitling him to travel on all public conveyances. He had also the right to a seat and to a travel companion. At this point I was his travel companion. Margit was to pay for her ticket and not know us in case of a raid.

The Colonel soon found the seat reserved for invalids. Margit and I were standing. Rather, I should say that we were on our feet, and already I was wondering how long I would be able to endure the absurd contortion I found myself in. We somehow managed to park our luggage between our legs.

Waiting for departure, I caught glimpses of Andrée on the quay, her white hankie, tears in her eyes. I wondered if I would see her again, and I realized that she really meant a great deal more to me than I had been willing to admit.

The train began to move, not much behind schedule. Soon, Andrée and her white hankie, waving now, had disappeared.

We had been under way for a while, and not traveled far yet, when there was an air raid alert. It didn't amount to anything and soon we moved on at a snail's pace. At times I was sure that I could have walked faster.

By nine o'clock we reached Ottignies, our first stop, and from all appearances, perhaps also the last. As far as one could see there was freshly smoldering destruction. Bomb craters along the tracks continued into the green fields on each side of us. Rails, torn into grotesquely winding shapes, reached pitifully to the now quiet sky. The town itself was hidden from view by burnt-out railway cars, torn and tossed about by the whim of bombs.

Moaning and groaning, the train pulled itself past an enormous crater in which Russian prisoners of war shoveled dirt apathetically. On a nearby stretch of railway track stood some freight cars. These seemed to serve as housing for the prisoners. Of the many tracks meeting at Ottignies, one remained passable, and on this one our train reached the burnt-out hull of what used to be the station.

To our surprise, we did not stop, and even picked up speed, and arrived at Namur at 9:30 a.m. There, my aching limbs were grateful for having to get off the train.

We found a café across the street from the main entrance to the Namur depot and delighted in some soda water and bread.

Another train was to take us to Jemelle by way of Dinant. From there a local would take us to our destination which was still unknown to me. Also, I didn't know at the time, that Margit would get off in Rochefort.

After a long wait of several hours our next train puffed into our lives. The day had become all but unbearably hot. I was grateful for the room available, for the chance to sit down. The Colonel found his reserved seat at one end of the car. Margit and I sat next to each other at the other end.

We moved through increasingly lovely land that stretched itself dreamily and peacefully over gentle hills.

Margit annoyed me to no end with her urge for talking. She got so carried away, she seemed oblivious of the people around us. One of them was a stout young blond sitting across from us. She smiled at me once in a while, but mostly looked indifferently at the passing scenery while giving me the distinct impression of being all ears. Margit kept talking about Poldi, Walter, and other friends, whose names were hardly Belgian. I did not answer her questions with more than a grunt, but that didn't slow her down.

The conductor came to check tickets. The blond could not find her's for a while, and as she dived through her bag, other cards came to light. Her ticket found, she snapped her bag shut and glanced at us, probably wondering if we had seen. I managed to look indifferently at the passing landscape, sure that Margit too had seen the pink card with the woman's photo on it, identifying her as a female agent of the Gestapo, for suddenly Margit had lost her desire to chat.

To my relief, the agent got off the train at the next stop.

Jemelle, an enormous railway depot, was reached late that sunny afternoon. Its numerous tracks were crowded with railway engines and cars of various types and sizes.

Considering that our next train would not come till evening, Colonel Henry suggested a short walk in the beautiful countryside. He noted that Jemelle had not been bombed yet, that it made him nervous to sit around in such an attractive target.

Having checked our luggage at the depot, we walked off on a road that had rock formation on one side, railway tracks on the other. In a leisurely fashion we strolled through an underpass leading to the other side of the tracks and the town. At the other side of the underpass, we were going to turn right, but turned left instead. German MPs had a roadblock on the right.

At the far end of town, we made ourselves comfortable at a café where we drank some more soda water and ate some more bread. Then, at nightfall, we returned to the depot to catch our train.

The only thing wrong with that train was that it failed to arrive. All night long we sat waiting with some thirty other weary travelers, in a small, ill-kept dusty waiting-room. It was lit by a tiny oil lamp, a maximum of light the fear of bombers allowed. More annoying was that it became very cold during the night, and I, as well as some other travelers, spent it standing, regretting the shortage of sitting opportunities. My eyes and my feet competed for my attention by complaining with equal fervor.

Margit and the Colonel did have a seat. I hoped that Margit would get some sleep. I don't believe that the Colonel did, because whenever I stepped out on the quay to move around, he joined me to keep me company and to tell me of his fantastic adventures.

This is how I found out about his leg. As I had suspected, he lost it in 1940 when in command of a defensive position at the Albert Canal. His soldiers fought like "angry lions". No German could have come through his sector had he not run out of food and ammunition.

"We were betrayed!" He exclaimed angrily. "There were plenty of supplies. But we kept getting the wrong kind. Useless stuff."

He was silent for some moments and kicked the concrete walk with his cane. Then he went on to tell me about the many bombardments his position had been subjected to, and the one during which he was injured. The ambulance that took him to the rear was hit by a bomb. When he regained consciousness he was in a clinic and his right leg was gone.

I also learned of his tour of duty in the Congo, India and other places.

With daybreak at 6 AM, came a train, but it was not ours. However, a number of people left with it, and those of us who had been standing, could at last sit down. Margit still tried to sleep, but didn't succeed.

Finally, our train arrived and happily we boarded it, but it stood in the station for a long time before leaving.

We had been closer to Rochefort than I realized. There we bid Margit farewell and were on our way without further delay.

The countryside was beautiful and the air sharp and clear. By now the train was almost empty, and when a few minutes after leaving Rochefort, we pulled into Villers sur Lesse, the Colonel and I were the only ones to get off.

It was still early. No one was about but a few chickens which roamed this tiny station.

I was informed that the village was at a fifteen minutes walk on a road that went over a small iron bridge over the river Less, then went on amid a splendid greenery of fields and trees.

The Colonel thought his wife might come to help with the luggage. So we waited, basking in the brilliant sun, listening to the gurgle of the nearby river and the chatter of birds. What a happy contrast with my mornings in the city, I mused.

The station master appeared, a rounded, bemustached man. He greeted the Colonel heartily. The latter introduced me as a cousin's son come to vacation in the village for a few days.

Coming from the village, some people appeared on the road; slowly moving dark dots on a silvery band. I had brought pocket opera glasses and now enjoyed trying their power. They worked fine. Clearly there was a woman with two small boys. The Colonel was deep in conversation with the station master. I wondered if the woman on the road was his wife.

Breathing deeply the refreshing country air, I walked to the bridge to admire the rushing water. Also from the bridge I had a good view of the royal summer castle of Ciergnon, which sat majestically on an otherwise building-devoid green hill.

The Colonel joined me and told me that the Royal Family was in residence at the castle now, under the "protection" of several dozen Germans. The land to the right side of the road, as well as part of the village Villers sur Lesse was on royal property.

The woman and the two boys were not the soldier's family. So, we borrowed a small cart from the station master, and having loaded our two suitcases on it, we got under way.

Once over the bridge, the road curved to the left, then led up an incline. Equipped with rubber tires, the cart was easy to push. We progressed slowly along the road, past an egg-yolk-yellow small hunting lodge, to our right, practically hidden from the world by a high stone wall. According to my companion, the lodge belonged to the royal children.

To our left stretched open fields dotted with occasional trees, black and white cows and women bend over chores. The road was quite deserted.

At the very edge of the village we were finally at our destination. It was a small white stucco house. Its entrance led directly into its kitchen..

The Colonel's wife, a frisky lean lady, whose auburn hair was tied in a chignon, was obviously much younger than he. (Later, I learned that she was a distant cousin.) Their pale and skinny sons, not yet ten, impressed me at once with their lack of manners. It was certain that they had never suffered any discipline, military or civilian. The smaller was cross-eyed and wore glasses. The baby girl was sleeping at the time. Mrs. Henry had not expected a guest, but didn't seem to mind.

After unloading the cart, I took it back to the station.

When I returned, Madame showed me to a small room on the second floor which was to be mine for a few days, until a more permanent shelter was found for me on a farm. The room, next to the children's room, was neat and clean. There was a pleasant view from its window. I removed my shoes, threw myself on the inviting bed and slept till late in the afternoon.

By the time I woke, Mrs. Henry, Madeleine, had food ready.

As in most small homes, the kitchen was also the dining and living room. I spent an interesting evening there, learning about some of the inhabitants of the village. Also I heard about youngsters who had preceded me as temporary guests of my hosts. I was told where I should not venture when out for a walk.

Later, a young man came to call. I was introduced to him as the visiting son of a cousin. His name was Edward, a likable chap with a friendly open face and the sandy tan of the country. His father was a railroad man, and he was still in school.

Edward promised to show me the countryside.

The next morning, Madame, took me to meet the Sefrains, who were friends of the Henrys, and who were hiding a three year old Jewish girl at their home. Mr. Ferdinand Sefrain was the village' electrician.

That same day, while walking with the Colonel, I encountered a rather stout girl of about fourteen who I was told was also Jewish. This girl looked Jewish.

"Why don't you talk Yiddish to her?" the Colonel suggested. We both shook our heads. Under the circumstances, neither she nor I seemed inclined to speak Yiddish.

According to the Colonel, the girl's sister and her mother were also hidden in the village. The mother seemed to have caused some sort of friction between the Colonel and the owner of the only grocery store in the village.

More than a little surprised by the Colonel's eagerness to talk about the Jews hidden in the area, and the people who were hiding them, I did not ask him to elaborate when he did not.

The Colonel wanted me to be familiar with the village and its surroundings, and on our long walk that day, I did learn other matters of interest. For example, there were two more small Jewish girls hidden here. Both were under five years old, and one had been baptized. One was in the care of an elderly forester and was happily spoiled, the other had been less lucky. Again, the Colonel did not provide details, and I did not press for those.

I also learned that it was the Belgian army's chief rabbi's wife, Madame Ullmann, who steered Jewish children in need of hiding to the Colonel. He then tried to find shelters for them in the Ardennes. This was how Margit had come to Rochefort.

I wondered if Ullmann knew that at least one of the children she had sent to the Ardennes had been baptized.

Colonel Henry had the interesting hobby of reading and collecting detective stories. Under the modest roof of his small home in Villers sur Lesse, was the largest collection of detective stories I ever saw.

Villagers borrowed books from him, and I joined their quest for distraction by reading a book with the enticing title "The Dead Rise At Ten PM." But the title did not keep it's promise. The dead rose at ten alright, but then managed to put me to sleep.

The Henry children, Ronald, Robert and Monique, in order of seniority, accepted me quickly. They crawled and jumped all over me, threw rocks at me, spittle, and nicknames which could have cracked the pride of any man.

At the table, they usually managed to create a riot.

The education and discipline of these little monsters was entirely in the hands of Madame. The Colonel ignored them completely, no matter what.

Each child wanted something else to eat, and not infrequently changed its mind after it got what it so badly wanted. Or one decided not to eat just now.

The food was, of course, rather simple and there was not much. I for one remained constantly hungry. I knew I was because of the headache.

It was one of my chores to fetch the little ones for dinner. That meant looking for them from one end of the village to the other. Usually, I located them by following my ears to some screechy quarrel.

Unfortunately, the Henry's had no radio. This meant that we had no first-hand news from the BBC, and that I spent hours in the evening amusing the darlings with my mouth-organ, while their parents were engrossed in a detective story.

Sunday morning was devoted to preparations for the eleven o'clock mass. There was an earlier service which was out of the question, for it took Madame some time to get the offspring washed, combed and dressed.

I used this time to write letters to Andrée and Lillian, Emil's fiancée. (Writing letters was an art. Because the mail was censored, its content had to be innocuous. Before I left Brussels, my friends and I had devised a code that would enable us to communicate. For example, "give my love to your mother" would mean that everything was fine. "So, and so wants to be remembered to you", meant that so and so had fallen into the hands of the Germans.)

Colonel Henry didn't go to church. He hinted at a personal quarrel with organized religion, but I suspected that he preferred to enjoy a short peace while his sons were gone. The baby girl stayed home.

The church was rather attractive, and crowded. I entered in the company of Madame and the boys, well prepared with a rosary and a missal, a gift from the thoughtful Andrée, who had also instructed me in the service.

In the village, where everyone knew everyone, my appearance was duly noted. I was looked over curiously, and girls stuck their heads together to quickly whisper urgent comments. (There were fewer and fewer young men around in those days.)

Early that afternoon, Edward, true to his promise, came to fetch me for a walk. It was a pleasant experience on a pleasant day, until we reached the road that led to the railway station.

To our right was a field in which pigs were wallowing. I admired the healthy look of the animals, and Edward asserted, not without pride, that no other place could lay claim to such beauties. The pigs were interesting, but my attention was diverted to a girl who appeared on a bicycle on a road on the other side of the field. Edward knew her of course, and wanting to introduce me, began to call her on the top of his voice. I begged him to desist from raising such a fuss, but the girl had heard him and probably thinking that he was on fire, turned to look. Her bicycle wavered then flattened itself against the road, girl and all. It looked like a bad fall, for the girl did not attempt to get up.

Startled, we jumped over bushes serving as a fence, and ran through the indignant pigs, leaping across and over all kinds of stinky obstacles, to reach the scene of the accident. When we got there, seconds later, the young lady, who by the way was very attractive, began to disentangle herself and rose to her feet stammering in embarrassment. The bicycle was undamaged, but the same could not be said of its rider's knees.

Another girl, who must have witnessed the fall, came running. I offered to get bandages, but the unlucky cyclist, regaining her composure, assured me that these were not needed. She had not very far to go and would be alright. We apologized for being the cause of the mishap. I was introduced, and before we parted, we had arranged a date for that evening.

The date consisted of another walk around the village, a pleasant chat with the girls, and before it was over, I had climbed the wall of the hunting lodge enclosure to fetch some lilac blooms for the girls. The accident was forgotten by all, except for a couple of sore knees.

Later that evening, the Colonel told me that he was leaving for Brussels early the next morning, and that I was invited to escort him. We would travel by way of Dinant where he had some business to attend.

A tremendous explosion shook the village from its sleep at three o'clock in the morning. The Colonel and I dashed outside. Minutes later a car came racing into the village. Two men jumped from it. In the darkness, I could not see much, but I noticed that they wore Belgian army uniforms. They asked directions and were off again. Partisans? They probably asked directions to mislead possible pursuers. After all, they should have known where they were and where they were going. Anyway, no one came after them.

What had happened during the night, was that one of the three railway bridges, west of Villers had been blown up. The Colonel determined to go to Brussels anyway, instead of departing from Villers, walked with me to Wanlin to get a train there.

In the village of Wanlin, a train was promised for noon. We settled in a café near the station. From there, I walked every fifteen minutes to the quay to find out whether or not a train had been announced yet.

When we finally departed, we found ourselves in an all but empty train. Our first destination was Dinant, and just outside that city our train came to a halt. Dinant was being bombed. Those on the train got off to watch, hoping also that the pilots would see the shabby civilians by the train and not mistake it for a military objective. The sky was black, or rather silver with planes. Anti aircraft fire was fierce. When bombs exploded we could feel the ground shake under us.

Eventually, we slowly rolled into the Dinant terminal. It was undamaged. Apparently most of the bombs had fallen north of the city on the railway tracks and on the next railway station. If the lines to Namur were severed, we would have no choice but to try to get to Brussels by way of Liège. In the meantime, we set out to visit some of the Colonel's relatives.

Dinant is a very beautiful city. Divided by the majestic river Meuse, over which a still intact bridge led to the tall, onion-towered church, that stood at the foot of an enormous cliff. On top of these towering rocks sat the famous fortress of Dinant. Even from where we stood, it looked very respect-commanding. A prize target of earlier bombings, it had never been hit. The same could not be said of the buildings which stretched along a highway under the cliff on both sides of the church. They had been demolished by German bombers in 1940 who, no doubt, had the fortress in mind.

We walked along the bombed-out street where flowers and weeds had taken roots among the toppled walls. Then, we spent a couple of hours with some of the Colonel's dull relatives, and I was glad when the time came to return to the railway station.

The Colonel had only brought two slices of bread, and though they were easy to carry and not too costly, they were not much to look forward to. I was therefor pleased when we stopped at a store to add some cheese to our provisions. Actually, in the prevailing heat, I suffered more from thirst than from hunger.

No sooner had we arrived at the station, when there was another alert. I had been carrying the Colonel's suitcase, and now, instead of being able to put it down, we turned around to seek the illusion of greater safety in a café across the street. Actually, when Americans chose to bomb a railway depot, there was usually more of it left after the attack than of its surrounding. But we could not go any further even if we wanted to, because it was against the law to circulate during an alert. Germans patrolled the streets, usually on bicycles, until bombs fell.

The café was packed with people who all seemed to have had the same idea: to sit there until this alert was over. The large window panes tingled unpleasantly as bombs began to explode. Some of the customers spent their time guessing the distance to the last explosion. Their murmur ceased for moments when more bombs fell and the café shook.

A few German soldiers had entered the place, but they were not German. No German soldier would be that sloppily dressed, that unshaven and unclean in public. These soldiers pushed their way to the bar and putting on lordly airs ordered beer as if they did not have a couple too many already. Having gulped down their drinks, they left, mumbling curses in a Slavic language. (Like the Rexists in Belgium, these soldiers were probably Nazis of some other conquered country.)

As we watched them through the large windows, they were stopped by a German patrol while crossing the street. They showed their IDs and we could see, that the beer they just had would have to last them a while, for the patrol took them away.

After the alert, our train being indefinitely delayed, the Colonel decided that we should make another call. We set out for a parochial school where students lived in. The place was located on a high hill, and on the way up we paused often to admire the view - and to rest.

The school was very large, spotlessly clean, and surrounded by a well tended, beautiful garden. According to the Colonel, we had come to visit a girl who was hidden here. While he was in the director's office to obtain permission to see the girl, I walked up and down a handsome, tiled hallway.

We went through a large dining hall to meet Lizette who worked in the kitchen. A kindly nun offered us "coffee" and buttered bread for which I was very grateful. I didn't listen to the conversation between the Colonel and Lizette, but afterwards, the Colonel informed me that he had decided to stop at this school again, on our way back from Brussels, to pick up the girl to take her to Villers. He told me that Lizette, who had dark hair and dark eyes was Jewish.

Back at the railway station there was no train in the foreseeable future for Liège, but a "local" was about to try to get to Namur somehow. Our timing had been good. The train took off as soon as we boarded it. To our left of the train were rock formations and to the right the river Meuse.

Almost half way to Namur, we passed through Ivoire, where Margit had been hidden with the Van Guchts for a while. Along roads we saw heavy rolls of barbed wire, ready for quick road blocks, and at major highway intersections were concrete bunkers.

Late in the afternoon, as the sun was setting in a reddish sky, our train stopped abruptly next to a German anti-aircraft train spiked with guns. From one of the cars, which apparently housed the crew, dance-music flowed to us from a radio.

The head of an officer appeared in the window of a small steel cabin fitted between the guns. Halting an earphone in his hands, he shouted:

"Alert, alert! Prepare to fire!"

There was a sudden running and shouting as soldiers precipitated themselves to their stations. Some searched the darkening sky with field glasses. 'Just what I always wanted', I thought, 'to be next to an ack-ack train during an air raid'.

Now the growling of plane engines could be heard. In seconds the guns were pointing at a large, low flying plane, heading straight for us and the guns. God, there would not be enough scrap metal left of that plane to make a coffin. Then a sigh of relief ran through the crowd in our car when we realized that the plane was a German transport. With a roar it passed over us.

The train continued at a snail's pace over a huge bridge which had been bombed. Next to it was an even larger bridge whose enormous steel girders laid pall mall in the river below. It seemed that the Americans had been here earlier and the ack-ack train had not been much of a deterrent to their intentions.

According to the Colonel, the smoldering remains of several large brick buildings along the riverbank had been army barracks.

Soon the train stopped at a small station and we were informed that we would have to get off and continue on a Vicinal.

After half an hour of waiting, one arrived. Because there were more passengers and luggage than there was room on the Vicinal, we had quite a time getting on. The Colonel's wooden leg was a deterrent to the acrobatics required of any would-be passenger. But somehow we managed, and eventually we arrived safely if not soundly at the Namur railway station, only to see the train for Brussels leave.

The very large waiting room was in a state of neglect. The unused buffet was bare, except for some empty beer barrels which stood under its large white marble-slab counter. Eating odorous cheese, we watched mice running around.

I don't know where the other passengers had gone, but we were the only ones in the waiting room, and giving in to a yen to stretch out, I installed myself on a large table.

Colonel Henry went reconnoitering and returned with the good news that there would be an express train for Brussels at midnight, which would get us to Brussels by morning.

I put the briefcase in which I carried a few essentials for traveling, under my head and tried to sleep. But now, more and more people joined us, and their chatter and clutter in this tiled place, where every noise was magnified and given a few echoes, kept me awake. Before long the waiting room was filled with hopeful travelers. The mice had long fled.

At nightfall, two clerks brought two oil lamps. Sat them on a table near the entrance. From there they shed a stingy and morose light over the people, who stood, sat or laid among the luggage.

The erratic train schedule had brought to this waiting room an unusual assortment of people from various walks of life. Most were farmers with sacks of farm products, which brought a profit in the cities.

There were also some better attired businessmen, people whose business could not be easily guessed, and even a bearded gentleman, maybe a professor, who stroked his full white beard thoughtfully from time to time.

Naturally, the occupant was represented also. Three Gestapo agents had planted themselves near the lamps. Easily recognized by their gray German trench-coats and felt hats, their identity was known to everyone, but no one had thought of offering them a seat.

A group of farmers, under the influence of the liquor they sipped, began to express loudly their doubts of a German victory. They took turns making derisive remarks followed by bursts of laughter. One of the remarks was so humorous, the entire waiting room roared and a blushing German demanded silence. He got it for a little while. Sitting on a table in a dark corner of the room, I watched the growing tension with misgivings. This was bound to go too far. What if one of the Nazis called for reinforcement and MPs came to check us? There were plenty of them at the railway station. There was only one entrance to this waiting room. That ruled out a possible hasty escape for me.

The Colonel, who had been limping about, must have had a similar dread, for he now came to me and asked me to play my mouth-organ.

The idea did not appeal to me. I didn't want to attract that much attention. But he insisted and I began to play softly. All conversation ceased. The crowd listened in silence. Taking heart, the reverberating acoustics helping, I played myself into a perspiring frazzle. When I stopped to catch my breath, I received resounding applause and there were shouts for more. I played on for a while, noting with satisfaction that the mood in the room had changed.

The midnight train was six hours late. It arrived as I was about to doze off.

In Brussels, the Colonel dismissed me after he had made a date with me for the next day.

Andrée was surprised when I telephoned her. She had not expected to see me so soon again. Later, when we met at my mansard, she told me that it might well be a good idea to stay away from Brussels for the time being, because the Germans had intensified their raids everywhere in the city.

Having received permission to do some painting in Villers, I had my paint box and easel with me when I kept my appointment with the Colonel at his sister in-law's the next morning.

We left, heavily laden except for food. There was just one slice of bread between us and starvation. The Colonel must have thought that the vivid accounts of his heroic feats were ample nourishment for the trip.

Anyway, the trip back differed little from the one to the capital. After long hours of delays, discomforts, hunger, thirst and fatigue, we were again in Dinant where we picked up Lizette.

While we had been gone, another bridge had been blown up, which meant more walking and switching of trains. I don't know about the Colonel, but by the time we reached Villers, two and one half day after leaving Brussels, I was something of a de-hydrated wreck, and convinced that my yearnings to travel had been satisfied for all time to come.

To make my misery a little more complete, the little rubber-wheeled cart was not available this time, and I took off for the village dragging the Colonel's incredibly heavy suitcase, sustained only by the nearness of our destination. Lizette carried my briefcase, paint box and easel, plus her bag.

We had just crossed the small iron bridge that takes the road over the river Less, when we noticed a German patrol of three soldiers on a motorcycle with sidecar, that came towards us from the village. They passed us slowly, eyeing us curiously, then turned around and came back! We stopped.

The steel-helmeted officer of the patrol pointed to the 65 pound suitcase I had put down. I felt a buzzing around my navel, for by now I had put two and two together and just knew there were no potatoes in my load. (I learned later most was dynamite).

I must say that Colonel Henry remained complete master of himself. He offered a most becoming smile to the German who tried his French on him.

"I see you are an invalid. Oh, this suitcase very heavy, no? We take you to the village. What?"

My companion thanked the German most politely. He pointed out that I was very strong, the village not far, and the patrol obviously on an important errand. The German regretted that their services were not needed, and left after bidding us a good day.

Lizette had been in Villers before, and the kids welcoming her back, ignored me for a whole day - thank goodness. Before I had a chance to throw myself on my bed, the Colonel took me aside and talked to me again about finding a place for me on a farm. It would be just a matter of days.

Our trip seemed to have done nothing for the Henry's food supply. Early in the evening on the day of our return, Lizette, I, and Edward went out to search for snails for our dinner.

Dislodged from their housing and boiled, these snails were not more appetizing than they had been when we found them. They were tasteless, tough as rubber, and I managed to get two down.

The next day I accompanied the Colonel, "on some business" to Rochefort, a small and pleasant town. I had hoped for a visit with Margit, but it did not come about. Of course, the idea was unreasonable.

The following day, the Colonel took me to Wanlin on some more business, and to buy some meat. He forgot to also get some bread, and later in the day, with Edward, who had borrowed a bicycle for me from a girl cousin, I traveled back to Wanlin for the bread. The Henry's just would not shop at the local grocery.

In the evening Edward and I went for a pleasant walk.

The kids sneaked into my room at the crack of down to spit at my face to wake me, then ran to the door and from there threw pebbles at my head.

Hoping that somehow a stop could be put to the children's outlandish behavior, I talked to their mother. But, mother told me that she had noticed I did not like children, and that I should be ashamed of myself for telling such lies about them.

Lizette received the same attention from those darlings as I, but bore it in silence. To allow me to be useful, Madame kept me occupied sawing and chopping wood in the basement. Lizette, took care of the darlings, cleaned house and washed dishes. Well, there were not many dishes to wash.

The Colonel asked me to go to Brussels with him once more. This time it was to return a small boy, who would not behave himself to the satisfaction of his foster parents, to his mother.

Sunday morning, we received the child at a small railway station south of Villers. The boy looked well and had obviously been well cared for by the elderly couple, who took this moment of parting from him to reiterate their complaints. These were numerous and seemed exaggerated in view of the boys angelic appearance. But, long before we reached Dinant, the little darling had proven his foster parents right. Colonel Henry, the former commander of a battalion, not accustomed to disciplining kids, had his hands full just trying to keep this one under control.

We arrived in Dinant at the same time as a German express, --some trains were exclusively for Germans- heading for Paris. It had stopped and from it a civilian hastened to the railway buffet to quench his thirst with some two percent beer. Before he could lift his glass, his train started to leave. With undisguised glee, the people on our train watched the cursing German make a desperate dash for his train. At the end of the long quay, he did catch it with a neck-risking leap he was sure to remember to his dying day.

For us, there was no express and we had to wait patiently for the possibility to continue our voyage. In the meantime, we left the station, crossed the street, and ate something at a café. But neither I nor the boy had our hunger satisfied. The boy simply kept nagging for food, until the Colonel sent me with him to find some bread. We went to several, almost bare stores, until we came to a bakery where some loaves of bread shone in a glory only hunger can appreciate. While I inquired cautiously if I could buy some bread without ration stamps, the boy had located a lonely cake on the counter, and asking what kind it was, he scooped up a handful of frosting from it and stuck it in his mouth, while the face of the lady behind the counter changed from a light pink to purple.

I bought the cake instead of the bread at an exorbitant price. For once the Colonel lost his temper and administered a couple of resounding slaps to our little monster. But these were quickly forgotten, and complaints about thirst could not be stopped until the boy had several orange-flavored drinks. The cake, a very anemic imitation of pre-war cake, was soon devoured.

A bus departed from the railway station for Namur, every hour on the hour, but the Colonel had an insurmountable aversion to bus transportation. He insisted on waiting for a train, even though none was promised for the foreseeable future.

Never the-less, one did show up late in the afternoon. It was going to Rochefort instead of Namur, but we boarded it anyway and were back in Villers sur Lesse, in the middle of the night. The Colonel had forgotten to take his keys along, and Madame, nervous as she was, refused to respond to the pounding on the door for quite a while.

Early the next morning, we left to try once more to get to Brussels. This time we tried a different route: Jemelle, Marche, Liège, Brussels.

Our luck had changed over night. The trip to Liège was slow but smooth without significant incidents, except for the boy's persistent peskiness.

In Liège, an express was leaving just as we arrived on the quay. The Colonel sent me ahead with orders to stop the already rolling train. Out of breath, I reached the engine, and running along side, I shouted at the engineer that a Belgian Officer, a war invalid, recipient of the highest royal distinctions, wanted to get on the train but could not run to catch it.

The train came promptly to a halt and waited until we were on it and the Colonel was seated, before resuming its journey.

Arrived in Brussels, the Colonel took us to his residence, a pleasant apartment in the district of Uccle. From there, on his own initiative, he called the baroness and asked for permission to have Andrée come to see me and to stay over night, so that she could accompany us to the railway station the next morning when we were to leave again. Then, while I tried to catch up on sleep, he took the boy to his mother. (Officially, the Colonel had created a program that provided children of Belgian Nazis, serving the Germans, with vacations in the lovely country side. Some of these children turned out to by Jewish. The boy we had returned was one of the Nazi children.)

Andrée, the Colonel and I, ate dinner at the apartment, and had an altogether pleasant evening. Andrée retired to a small guest room next to the kitchen, I slept in the children's room, and the Colonel preferred to pass the night reading a detective story.

The piercing scream that woke me at two a.m., was only Andrée having a nightmare.

We got up at 3:30. Colonel Henry prepared some breakfast.

The soldier ate some snails he had brought from Villers, but Andrée and I preferred just bread and "coffee".I ate as much as I could, knowing that we would have little to eat while traveling.

Recent bombings began to show results. There was no train that morning. Of course, this could not stop us. Resolutely, we began our journey by taking a Vicinal that was leaving for Louvain. That streetcar was so packed, I could not even wave to Andrée. The Colonel, of course, got the seat so thoughtfully reserved for invalides by his government.

As we traveled from village to village, the tremendous damage done by the bombings became apparent to me. In some places only ruins remained. The university city of Louvain, where we had to change Vicinal, was a shamble.

In Tirlemont we changed Vicinal again to get to Liège. Suspicious of the Colonel's heavy suitcase, I had adopted the strategy of stashing it as far as possible from me, preferably at the other end of the car. In case of a raid, I was going to disclaim it, but this time, I carried two and got stuck with them on a platform. Each time we rattled over a track crossing, and the suitcases danced to the rhythm of the jumping wheels, my heart skipped a beat or two, while I wondered what it would take to make these things blow up.

A very obese lady asked my permission to sit on one of the suitcases to rest her weary bones, and while I hoped that her soft masses would steady it, the Colonel read another detective story.

In Liège we had no trouble getting a train for Namur. There were some air-raid alerts, but we were so used to them now, we hardly paid any attention. Anyway, this seemed to be our lucky day, for once in Dinant, we got another train in no time. However, it only went as far as Wanlin, and there we stood tired and perspiring that sunny afternoon, relatively close to our destination, hoping that a local commuter would come along to take us the remaining few miles to Villers.

Near us on the quay stood a German soldier. Leaning on his rifle, he neither moved nor flinched, although some women had gathered around him to give him a piece of their mind.

According to these ladies, the soldier was a s.o.b. who they hoped would soon fry in hell, together with all the other Germans, their Fürer, and all of the "*Thousand Year Reich*". Perhaps stimulated by the stoic comportment of the subject of their scorn, these women became more and more brazen. One in particular, eyes blazing, hair flying, kept shaking her fists at the "*Bosch*" and, foaming and fuming, showed him a photo of her husband who had been shot by Germans in 1940.

The soldier shrugged: "I don't understand French".

The Colonel, whose German was passable, promptly offered his services as a translator. He limped his imposing figure through the circle of women to the soldier who had pulled a photo from his jacket showing his wife, and a son in the uniform of a Hitler Youth, who he explained had been killed by British bombs. Like thousands of other Germans soldiers, this one volunteered, he said, to be at the Western Front to greet the English, should they be foolish enough to try another landing. (The British had once landed at Dieppe.) If the Allies did no acknowledge the superiority of the German Army yet, they would after that. He himself, on his way back to his unit after a short vacation, had become lost, and was waiting for a train to get him back on the right track.

The females, now thoroughly seething, cut his words with insults and assurances that the English would walk all over the Germans, and the Russians would tear to pieces whatever was left of them.

Colonel Henry translated coldly all of it to the unflinching German. One could see that the man had been educated by the German Army. He smiled benignly and stated that the Russians had been stopped in the Carpathians, sitting there in a trap, ready to be annihilated by the great German counter-offensive which was to come in October and which was to force Russia to its knees. As for the Americans, his gesture of contempt said more than a dictionary.

The train that huffed and puffed into the station just then probably saved the "*Bosch*" from being lynched. I wondered if he was aware of that.

Shortly thereafter our train arrived and took us directly to Villers, over the bridges already repaired by the German corps of engineers, which had Russian prisoners work on them around the clock. The labor of these good Russians had been a waste of time and energy, for that very night one of the three bridges west of Villers was blown up again.

The Colonel was convinced, more so than I, that the Germans would not raid Villers, because it was partly on royal property.

I was restless when in the village and felt more at ease when walking in the countryside. Sometimes, I went with Madame and the darlings to look for wood for the kitchen stove, and sometimes I went with the Colonel on a mysterious errand, or simply to a secluded farm for some butter.

On Thursday, May 18th., Ascension Day, the entire village went to church.

By the time the Henrys were ready, at eleven o'clock, I had written a letter to Andrée which the Colonel was to take to Brussels on his next trip.

This time, he would take Lizette with him instead of me, and I didn't dream of objecting, though I wondered how Lizette would manage the suitcase. But perhaps, there was not going to be one.

The next day, Lizette and I walked to Wanlin on an errand. Although of a melancholic disposition, she was really a pleasant girl, easy to talk with, but I had not yet dared talk to her about being Jewish. Our main subject of conversation were the Henry children. We tried to devise ways and means of dealing with them, since Lizette suffered as much from them as I.

We were about half way to Wanlin when Edward joined us with his bicycle. He had found out where we had gone and came to keep us company. This did not surprise me because I knew by then that he was courting Lizette.

Later that evening, I was amazed at the way Lizette spoke up to the Colonel when he told a joke about Jews. But then, Lizette was not one to take any ribbing from anyone.

Early the morning of the 20th., I accompanied the Colonel and Lizette through a fine drizzle to the railway station. Arrived there, the Colonel noticed that his flashlight batteries were burnt out. He sent me and Lizette back to the village to fetch new ones.

On the way, I talked with Lizette about the preceding evening, assuring her that the Colonel had only been jesting, and then I casually asked her if she was Jewish. To my surprise, she said that she was not. Well, instead of leaving things be, I had to suggest that she had no reason to be afraid of telling me. When she insisted that she was not Jewish, I realized I had committed a gaffe, apologized, and asked her not to mention it to the Colonel.

The latter was in an excellent humor when we returned with the new batteries and had me play the mouth-organ while we waited for the train.

On the road to Wanlin was a place from where one had and interesting view of Villers, church tower, cows, hills in the distance, and so on, and after the train had left with the Colonel and Lizette and the rain had stopped, I went there to paint my very first oil painting.

Soon I realized that I should have chosen a less ambitious panorama for my first effort at an oil scenery. I did get the church tower straight after several tries, but the cows in the foreground created serious doubts about my career as an artist. Eventually, I managed to have a presentable picture, but was glad that Dirkx was not looking over my shoulder.

I began to paint in the middle of the morning, but became so involved, it was already 3 p.m. when I looked at my watch. My stomach and legs informed me unhappily that I had neglected them. I packed up to get back to the village.

It was then that American fighter planes appeared, so low and so slow, I could see the pilots. Of course, I waved at them frantically. Surely, they could see me in my white shirt. My heart was aching. How easily one of them could have landed on the enormous field I was standing on and taken me with him. But, of course, this did not occur to any of them.

Then there came more. Something dropped from two or three of them. Could three oblong objects which fell too slowly to be bombs be supplies for partisans?

I hurried back to the village. The forester stopped me as I passed his home to look at my work. He put on his pince-nez and counted the roofs on my painting thoughtfully until he discovered his own, then pronounced my painting a fine work of art.

Finally, I got to the village. There, I found out that the planes had dropped three empty gas tanks. One had fallen into the chimney of the bakery causing a small fire with much smoke, another one had damaged the corner of a house. People could not understand why the pilots had chosen to drop the empty tanks on the village rather than on the wide open country around it.

Madame Henry decided that my painting was not bad, even though my cows looked like over-sized rats, and together with Josée, a neighbor's daughter which happened to be visiting, she laughed herself silly. I had to promise to work some more on the painting to do greater justice to the local bovines.

After that, I engrossed myself in one of the Colonel's books: "A Phantom Henchman". (Later, I gave that painting to Madame as a souvenir.)

Sunday the 21st., was a beautiful spring day in the truest sense of the word. Sun-caressed the citizenry decked in their best finery flocked to church. Their happy babbling, and the cheerful cackling of chickens filled the air.

We had been to the eleven o'clock mass, and at high noon we emerged from the candle-dotted dimness of the sanctuary into the glittering sunshine where boys flirted with giggling girls under the patronizing gaze of their relatives.

Suddenly we froze. The happy sounds gave way to abject silence as a thunderclap toppled from the clear blue sky. It was followed by a terrifying explosion which for a moment made us weightless and breathless. Then it was over and people started to run, silently and perhaps instinctively to their homes.

The quiet that had set in after the explosion was suddenly pierced by wild, inhuman screams. As if on command, the scurrying feet changed direction towards the source of the heartrending sounds.

Thus we arrived at a small, unattractive, half decadent home that is often the shelter of the poor. And, as is often the case for the poor, the Jus family had a large number of ill kept children. Mr. Jus, who was not home, was an unskilled railway laborer. His portly wife suffered from a lung ailment and also from a case of bad nerves. I knew the Jus as friendly and polite people, greeting and smiling at everyone who crossed their path.

It was Madame Jus, who sprawled on the stone floor of her paltry kitchen, swinging arms and legs wildly about her, was screaming frightfully. Her dull, long, red hair clung to the floor moistened by the water someone seemed to have poured over the poor woman's head. The stifling heat in the low-ceiling place was all but unbearable.

Madame Henry, who had been to her own home already, had brought some bandages and ether. Always conscious of her rank, she tried to take charge by asking the excited women crowding the Jus' kitchen to get out and make room for some fresh air. But almost everyone present had ideas about what should be done, and in the resulting confusion hardly anything was done, except that the poor woman's blouse had been unbuttoned and Madam Henry had managed to drop a bit of ether in her face; actually quite an accomplishment considering that Madam Jus trashed wildly about the floor. Occasionally, the poor woman had some lucid moments during which she called her sister's name, her husband's, and something about the explosion which she fancied had killed him.

Whenever her vocal cords took a short break, she would pull at her wet, red hair and moan.

I too had an idea and suggested to Madam Henry to hold the woman under the water pump, but Madam did not think this advisable considering Madame Jus' poor state of health.

The Jus' children stood pale and silent around their prostrated mother, while in front of the small house a large number of the village population was assembled to hear the screams from within.

I realized that my presence was neither needed nor desirable and went to the Henry's house where I plunged into another detective story in an effort to forget my hunger-produced nagging headache.

It was very hot that afternoon. Madame Jus was still screaming at 3 p.m. when I walked back to her home to check on developments. Most people had left by then, probably to eat their dinner. But there were a few women who took turns bending over the unhappy screamer, calling her name, talking to her soothingly, pouring more water over her head, and trying to keep her covered with a blanket. I asked Madame Henry why a doctor had not been called. She told me that the nearest one was in Rochefort. I also talked with Edward who happened to be there, and we decided that he should try to locate Mr. Jus.

Eduard returned with Mr. Jus before long, and as soon as his wife became aware that he was home, she regained her senses.

In the meantime, the cause of the explosion had become known.

Allied planes had strafed a German ammunition train that had stopped in a small village some fifteen miles north of Villers. The train blew up, just as people there emerged from their church, reducing the village and many of its inhabitants to dust and ashes.

It was on the very day that Cardinal VanRoey had a letter read in all the churches in Belgium, imploring the Allies to be more considerate of civilians.

I don't suppose the Allies got his message. The next day, when numerous people from the surrounding communities had converged on the disaster area to help dig out survivors and the dead, Allied planes returned and strafed the people scurrying over the rubble. Among the victims was a young man from Villers, a cousin of the electrician Mr. Sefrain, who was killed by a 50mm slug in his back.

I made repeated trips to the station to check incoming trains, but the Colonel and Lizette had not returned from Brussels when expected.

In the meantime, two men had come to meet with the Colonel.

It didn't take me long to realize that these men were with the Underground, and it didn't take them long to realize who I was. They were in their early thirties, suntanned, rough, quiet characters, who in spite of their young years had a streak of sadness in their eyes. They seemed to like me and I liked them, and in the course of conversation, they promised to get new IDs for me. Papers with an employment certificate rather than a student card, and giving me a Flemish background, rather than a Wallonish one. In Wallony, where Villers was, I could not very successfully parade as a Wallon.

Madame Henry objected to any dates on my part with local girls on the grounds that they deserved better company than I could provide. Maybe she did not mean what I understood, but her remarks angered me. Her feeling seemed not shared by the local girls who were quite anxious to date me. Anyway, disregarding Madame's objections, I had a date with Josée and another girl on Tuesday evening. The men who had waited for the Colonel for two days had left.

I met the girls at the church. They brought an extra bike for me and we bicycled to Wanlin. These girls were happy types, overflowing with laughter and easy talk, a great boost for my morose state of mind, but they were not very bright. By the time Edward joined us in Wanlin, as previously arranged, I was glad to have him along.

When I returned to Villers, later that evening, I found that the Colonel and Lizette had come home from Brussels. He was obviously furious, and it did not take much to realize why, because Lizette looked the image of guilt.

The Colonel sent her on an errand then bowled me out. Had I gone berserk? To ask the girl whether or not she was Jewish was the pit of stupidity, and unforgivable. Didn't I realize what was at stake?

He denied vehemently, that he himself had told me that Lizette was Jewish, and that at other occasions he had suggested that I talk Yiddish to another girl we had met in Villers. Madame said, it made sense that a fellow who didn't like kids would turn out to be troublesome.

The most important lesson I learned from all of this was that I had to be less trustful, and that the Colonel seemed to manipulate truth to suit his fancy. And I began to wonder about the existence of the farmer who was supposed to come for me any day now.

I didn't resent Lizette's indiscretion for very long, because it was obvious that she was very sorry she had mentioned our conversation to the Colonel. Still, I could not help cooling off towards her. She, however, began to pay special attention to me. In the morning, at the first opportunity she would have, usually right after our modest breakfast, Lizette dashed to my bedroom to clean it and to make my bed, a chore I had performed myself. I also would fetch water from the village pump whenever we ran low of water, but now Lizette watched the water supply, and before there was a real need for it, she was off to the pump to get more.

Useless to say, Madame thought Lizette's behavior most undignified, and to prevent it from going to my head, she had me saw more and more wood. There was no more room in the basement, and I started piling wood along one side of the house, and when the day was done I ached all over and could hardly walk.

One morning, the Colonel suggested that I should make a painting of the house, but I told him I didn't feel up to it just then. Aching as I did I could not see myself standing in the hot sun all day. But I gave him some other excuse about bad light at that time of day, and he didn't like my attitude. Apparently he was determined to find some way to have me earn my keep, such as it was, and so he did. Before the day was out, the Colonel arranged for me to help a house-painter paint the iron fences, balconies and doors of the beautiful estate of a certain Mr. Pilsoul. The job demanded much scraping of rust and old paint. The Colonel's offer of my assistance was immediately and gratefully accepted.

Mr. and Mrs. Pilsoul were elderly, quite ordinary in appearance, except that he looked somewhat dried out. Their home was exceptionally clean, exquisitely decorated and furnished. They had a garage, and there were tools for me, and I began chipping off loose paint and brushing off the rust under it with a wire brush.

In the glowing sun, I soon felt like an overdone pretzel. Thirst-driven I approached the painter I was assisting, and who worked in the shade, to ask him where I could find something to drink. The heavily freckled redhead offered me a drink from his beer bottle.
We talked a little and his French puzzled me. Suddenly, he asked me in Yiddish, if I were also Jewish. Now I knew what had puzzled me about him. I nodded. He said, "You must be crazy to work in the sun."

"The boss told me to work there."

"He did? Well, to hell with him. May the devil catch him before dawn! I will tell him that I need your help." And, promptly he started calling for the boss: "Hey, Mr. Pilsoul, where is it that you are? Hey Mr. Pilsoul!"

The boss came running. The redhead explained he needed me to coordinate the work, how everything would go faster and better if we were to work together. Mr. Pilsoul was all for faster and better, and so we worked together on a door in the shade.

The redhead was not really a house painter. Rather he was a Polish Jew from Sosnowitz, who had moved to Belgium. He and his wife rented a small room in Wanlin. He worked as a handyman for the farmers, helping with chores, repairs and painting.

He inquired about me and my family, and I was glad to be able to talk with someone sympathetic. "They all should catch the cholera, he intoned. The Nazis and their brood should fare like oil lamps! During the day they should be hung up, and at night they should burn!" He offered me some more of his beer. All in Yiddish, of course, and just then it was like music to my ears.

The Henrys had decided not to have me go for any more walks in the evening. I was not really upset by this new rule, because by the time evening came I was quite tired, and so I did not mind spending some time reading, while Lizette kept the kids off my back. Now it was "Loves and Crimes", a mystery recommended to me by the Colonel.

While we prepared to go to church for the Pentecostal service, on May the 28th., I finally told the Colonel that I was unhappy about being spit at by his kids, and he advised me to slap the next offender.

I did not have to wait long for an opportunity to follow the Colonel's advice. Robert, the oldest boy was the surprised recipient of my retaliation.

Of course, I did not hit him very hard, but he went off screaming to his mother anyway, telling her that I had struck him without the slightest provocation. Well, I got an ear full from the outraged mother, but I told her that I intended to defend myself from now on.

In the evening Edward and I went to look for snails for the Colonel who was supposed to go to Brussels soon again. When we returned, he informed me, a farmer would come for me in the morning. Edward promised to see me off, and then, before packing my suitcase, I still played the mouth-organ for the darlings who refused to go to bed without my unsavory attempts at music.

The farmer arrived Monday morning at 6:30, just as we were eating breakfast. Madam Henry invited him to eat with us, but he preferred not to, and instead sat in a chair waiting for me, turning his ancient large hat awkwardly in his hands.

The man was about thirty years old, and all one had to do was to have one glance at him to know that he was a true son of the country and the earth. His large knobby hands, his weather-beaten face spoke of countless hours outdoors. A large, rounded nose dominated his features and threw its wide shadow over his moist lips.

Right now, his mouth, like mine, hung wide open, as we listened in utter amazement to many noble and worthy qualities ascribed to me by the booming Colonel. After a while he had to stop to catch his breath, and the farmer, producing a red handkerchief wiped his sparsely haired skull thoughtfully. Then nodding slowly, he said that in spite of what the Colonel had just told him, I did not seem to have worker's hands, but that his father and he were willing to give me a try anyway.

We went outside. The Colonel was still talking to the farmer when I bid everyone farewell. The children embraced me, Madame gave me some last minute advice about working hard, Edward made some poor jokes, and Lizette silently squeezed my hand.

The leaves were covered with morning dew, and a copal sky promised a day filled with sunshine. Paint box and easel slung across my back and carrying my suitcase, I walked silently with the silent farmer pushing his bicycle.

Happy, I thanked heaven for my good luck. I don't know why I felt happy, because I also realized that I was on my way to harder physical labor than I had ever known. But I thought that if I were able to eat well, I had no reason to fear the work. Maybe I was glad to get away from Villers.

We walked in the long shadow of the long wall surrounding the royal hunting lodge. I offered the farmer a cigarette. He declined and went on to explain to me at great length, and in phrases that seemed to come with difficulty to him, why he was not a smoker. First of all, it would cost money, and secondly, he had a friend who suffered dire consequences from this evil habit, and so on. I listened only with half an ear to this heavy voice seemingly not used to conversation.

To our right, a girl led a herd of cows to pasture. As she stopped to look at us in puzzlement, I realized it was Josée. I probably would never walk with her again, and she would never tell me again about her little lamb's problems, or about the secrets of the cliffs on the road to Wanlin.

We arrived at the railway station, but we would not take a train. The farmer assured me that his farm was not very far, and besides, the railway didn't come to his village.

I stopped for a moment to look back. Now I could see the road to Villers exactly the way I saw it when I first arrived. Almost everything was the way it had been then. Birds sang, chickens cackled. No one seemed to be about. In the distance, Josée still stood in the pasture looking after us.

A few steps and it all disappeared. We were on the other side of the railway tracks on the highway to Rochefort.

My suitcase became heavy. The farmer had a carrier on his bicycle, but I didn't want to ask him to let me put my suitcase on it, for fear that he would think me weak.

The highway led through a forest. Tall trees lining the road formed an occasional roof over us, diminishing the effects of the already hot sun.

The farmer inquired about my ID. I hastened to assure him my papers were in order. He then told me that a flying fortress made a forced landing earlier that morning near Rochefort. Chances were that the Germans would comb the countryside looking for the fliers, who of course, had disappeared. According to the farmer, not only were they gone by the time the Germans arrived, but people had managed to strip the plane.

So far, the only people we had encountered had been small groups of lumber jacks on their way to fell some trees. Now, the sound of a motor came up behind us, and with it a small German army car which passed us at full speed. It was packed with soldiers. But when it passed us again a half hour later going the other way, only the driver was in it. A little later, it would rush by us again laden with soldiers.

In the meantime, we walked on. The forest was now far behind and the sun beat mercilessly down on us. The farmer wearing a hat and a jacket seemed to be better protected than I. He watched me sweat for a while, then finally suggested I should put the suitcase on the bicycle carrier.

At noon, we stopped to sit at the edge of a stone bridge to eat one slice of greased bread. But I was not hungry. I was too thirsty to be hungry. It was so hot that even the birds had stopped their activities and had fallen silent. There were hardly any people on the highway stretching endlessly before and behind us. Occasionally, German soldiers swished by us in their small open cars.

The highway swung in a giant curve. In spite of all the walking we had done, there was no sign of Rochefort yet.

Once we encountered some country girls, and my companion chattered gaily with them for some moments, surprising me with the sudden agility of his otherwise word-starved face.

The afternoon found us still walking on the endless highway. I had overcome my feeling of fatigue, and putting one senseless foot in front of the other, I hoped that I would not have to stop, for I was not sure that I could move on again. On both sides, fields stretched lazily under the burden of opulent growth. To our right, railway tracks gleamed along distant hills.

Finally, some houses appeared at the horizon. We crossed a stone bridge over the river Less and were in Rochefort. At a restaurant, my companion invited me to have a beer with him and let me pour two over my parched inside. We remained seated for a little while, and I received the good news that we were close to our destination: the village of Wavreille.

We crossed the city and the railway tracks, and were on the highway once more. I pushed the bicycle now with one hand holding my suitcase on its carrier with the other. Dance music came to us from a garden café, accompanied by salvos of laughter. The highway went uphill now, and by the time we left the last houses and the last bustle of Rochefort behind, I was painfully fatigued again. Soaked wet with perspiration, I was grateful that the sun was finally moving down towards the horizon.

Eventually, we passed the flying fortress, downed in a field to our left, its tall tail pointing to the sky. In the sun, now behind it, the German soldiers moving about the bomber looked like weird black insects. The trampled field testified to a thorough search still going on in the woods behind the field.

We passed a cluster of people watching from the edge of the road. Their gleeful amusement was a sure sign the Germans would not find anything.

This was hilly country, covered extensively with undergrowth and occasional large rocks, and here and there a house or two. Tall trees, lining the highway, whispered in the stillness of the parting day.

Night had fallen. We kept walking up hills and down hills. Sometimes we stopped for a few moments. Sometimes the farmer took the bicycle for a while.

Finally, a road left the highway to our right, leading to a village that loomed vaguely in the darkness ahead of us. We went by lightless, sleeping houses, which here had much open space around them.

"Wavreille." the farmer said, and to have arrived, spurned my legs to new effort.

But it was not until we had crossed the sprawling village, with a small church near its center, and found ourselves at a complex, large farm building, that we had reached our destination.

A lonely bulb shed an emaciated light through an open door onto the straw covered ground before it. We walked inside and were in the kitchen. In it, much space was occupied by a large Flemish oven. Next to the oven, against the wall on a cupboard, stood a beautiful wooden radio. Facing it, between the front and a back door, was a large table. The old woman who sat at the table, apparently waiting for us, had a sharp pointed face and flowing white hair. Skinny and bony, her curved back and her knobby, slightly trembling hands, complained silently of much hard labor.

We greeted each other briefly. I let myself down on a bench, at the wall alongside the table for a plate of milk soup the woman offered.

It was 11:30 PM. I really was too tired to be interested, but forced the soup down, imagining it was good for me.

The farmer, who sat down opposite me with his soup, informed me that considering today would be my first on the farm, I could sleep in till six. After that, I was to rise and shine at 5:30.

While walking ahead of me, up creaking wooden steps to show me my room, he told me that he would explain my chores in the morning. On top of the narrow staircase was a slightly oblique door. I was handed a tiny oil lamp and a wish for a good night.

The small bare room contained a small wooden bed and a dresser made of thick time-blackened lumber. Over the bed, a large crucifix, and next to the bed a rickety chair that served as a night stand completed the furnishings.

I set the lamp on the chair and hastened to take of my clothes to get into the inviting bed. It was a sheer delight to be able to lie down. Unfortunately, the bed was at least one foot shorter than I, but right then this mattered little.

Throbbing with exhaustion, my eyes burning with sleep, I blew the lamp out and tried to sleep.

But what was this? I was startled by some insects running over my legs. Bedbugs? Damn it all! I caught one and squashed it with my fingers. God in heaven! Another one and another one, and then a big one on my chest woke me completely. I squashed that one too and terrified jumped from the bed. That one had been too large, to be a bedbug. Stumbling about in the dark for matches, I hastily lit the lamp and pulled back the blanket.

The bed was full of spiders! Spiders of various sizes, colors, shapes and types, now running in all directions. Their panic was nothing compared with the revulsion I suffered.

I dressed, covered the bed, and spent the remainder of the night sitting on the chair.

Daylight had already overcome the little flame in the oil lamp when I finally fell asleep.

My room seemed to be directly over the cow stall, and soon activity down there woke me again. I noticed that the floor of my room consisted of thin boards with wide cracks between them. It certainly was not designed to keep much out from under it. Every cow's sigh, every moo, echoed gleefully through the room. As I walked to the dresser, to wash my face in the wash bowl which stood on it, I noticed that the floor bent happily and with much creaking with each step I took.

Now, in the light of day, I could see that everything in the room was covered with spiders and their eggs: bed, dresser, closet, walls and the ceiling. It was a scene ordinarily expected in nightmares only.

I tore the bedding off the bed, and cursing fled from the emerging beasts to the kitchen downstairs.

There I found bread and "coffee" on the table, and the old woman who wished me a good morning. She was in the company of another woman whom she introduced as her daughter. The latter was not only unpleasant to look at, but she also asked me how I slept. So, I told her at great length, adding that the room would have to be cleaned before the sun set again, and the spiders would have to be gone, as I was in no condition to feed them.

The daughter had turned the color of an over-ripe tomato and told me, apologetically, that a long time ago her niece had stayed up there. That had been over ten years ago. The room had neither been used nor cleaned since then. There was just too much to be done on the farm, she explained.

Well, I said that this was quite possible, but that I would leave the next morning if I found any more spiders up there. Then I had some marvelous bread and "coffee".

Eleven well-fed cows lived under my room. When after breakfast I walked into the stable, a large, husky woman dressed in black was busy milking them. Her dark hair was tightly combed and topped by a braid coiled into a crown. Her plain, round and pink face was ornamented by fiery sparkling black eyes. With a strong, baritone, she greeted me as if I were an old friend. To the farmer, who just joined us, she spoke in Walloon.

I had learned quite a bit of Walloon from Andrée and her family, but the one spoken here was different from the one in the Charleroi region, barely understandable. Having introduced myself as a native of Antwerp, my ignorance of the local dialect was readily forgiven. I was spoken to in book French.

We began work in the calves' stable adjacent to the cow's. The floor had to be cleaned, the straw renewed, a daily task now assigned to me. I gathered the droppings and the wet straw, scooped it with a pitchfork onto a square-wheeled wheelbarrow, that should have been given to a museum long ago, and made short trips to a big heap of waste to unload. To get there, I had to take an unpaved path between the barn and the wall of a nunnery. That walk was full of surprises for my unwary feet. Stones and deep, liquid filled holes, hid under ageless dirt and straw.

Until I knew where they were, I would invariably trip over one or the other and spill the odorous contents of the wheelbarrow.

After the calves came the pigs. There, filth had accumulated in hidden holes under the straw as well, and of course, I found each the hard way. Also, unlike the calves, the pigs had an unpleasant disposition and tried to stuff anything into their grunting faces, including my feet.

In the meantime, the cows had been milked and led to pasture, and their stall had to be cleaned.

After that, I fetched clean straw from a barn located behind the stalls, to recover the floors.

Then I turned my attention to a combination horse and bull stall. The horse was a large beautiful work animal endowed with intelligence and excellent manners. The enormous black bull had not any of these qualities. However, it was the largest animal I had ever seen.

As soon as I entered his premises, he would roar utter hatred at me and pull furiously at the heavy short chain that held him to the stone wall. To clean around that beast was only for the nimble footed. He never gave up trying to get at me. His frustration was kind of sad. And, although I treated the monster with great respect, he did not change his attitude towards me.

The horse watched with obvious interest and stepped politely aside to ease my task.

Cleaning the stalls took till seven a.m. Breakfast of "coffee" and buttered bread was served after that. Only on my first day on the farm had I received breakfast when I got up.

After breakfast, I usually chopped wood in a very large barn which also housed a good sized baking oven, assorted tools and farm implements, such as wagon wheels and chicken feed in bags stored on the loft.

The buildings on that farm were all made of stone, cooler on the inside than on the sunny outside. That was a stroke of luck, especially since the ax I had to use was dull and badly worn. I was sure it was at least as old as the wheelbarrow.

When I went in for lunch that first day, I met the old farmer, a man of 83, whose broad bent back, and whose huge square fists were the first to rise and the last to rest.

Five people gathered for lunch. The old farmer, his son, and three helpers: a small, dark and quiet man about thirty years old, whose black eyes and hair, together with and olive skin, made him appear Latino to me; the milking woman and I. The old farmer's wife and her daughter didn't eat with us.

While the old woman served soup, I was introduced to the old man who mumbled some unintelligible acknowledgment. Then pushing his dirty cap back, he made a wide and hasty sign of the cross and mumbled "Nom da djoulen", which is Walloon for "God damn it", before he noisily devoured his soup.

Like his son, he seemed to be a man of few words.

After soup, we had fried potatoes and small bits of salty bacon. As it turned out, this was what we ate for lunch and for dinner almost every day.

Whatever conversation there was at the table, was between the milking woman and the Spanish looking fellow, who never talked about himself, and I. This atmosphere was ideal as I was not eager to talk about myself either.

The door to the yard was open, and while we ate, some enterprising chickens ventured into the kitchen with their inevitable cackling. Two cats, who looked like mother and daughter, pussyfooted slowly between them and our legs looking for something.

After lunch, I was allowed to go to my room for a cigarette. The room had been cleaned, but there were still plenty of spiders behind the dresser and on the walls.

On my first day, after lunch, I was invited to sit in the back of an open wagon and was given the tour of the very large property consisting of several huge fields and woods.

It was a leisurely tour, the horse took it easy, and I didn't mind, considering that I was tired from lack of sleep and from having walked so far the day before. The sun was high and the earth smelled good.

At one end of the property, a road stretched between fields and woods in a waving silver band, slinging itself over hills and dales, offering a breath-taking view.

But I had not been brought to this spot to enjoy the scenery. There was an enormous stack of hay, and we began to load some of it on the wagon. Rain and sun had fused the bundles into a more or less solid mass, resisted efforts to be separated and displaced. A slight breeze sprayed dust on my wet skin and in my tired eyes. I coughed, sneezed, and the farmer smiled to himself, and the horse, aloof from it all, nibbled on a young bush.

We worked together silently, picking up bundles of caked hay and swinging them high onto the wagon. Unused to this sort of labor, my muscles complained soon pitifully, but my pride forced me to keep pace with the farmer.

Humidity inside the hay stacks had made them rot. As we progressed into the pile, the stench became unbearable.

Fortunately, a thunderstorm was brewing, and when it began to look serious, the farmer decided to be satisfied with the already considerable load. We took off sitting on top of the stinking mess which was destined for the Germans, and good enough for them as the farmer informed me.

Only a few large drops fell, then the sun continued to glow. Back at the farm, I unloaded the hay by myself, working ambitiously to impress the old man who was watching me from the kitchen door. He did not say one word, but from time to time he spat vigorously.

I had a few glasses of water from the pump. It was neither good tasting nor clean, but I didn't ask for milk, even though we were now working at separating cream from milk with the help of an electric machine. But then, the milk, collected in metal buckets which seemed to have not known better care than the guest room, was even less appetizing than the water.

In the meantime, the farmer had piled fence posts and barbed wire together, and after being done with the milk, we loaded the wagon, still reeking from the hay, with the fencing materials and took off for a field at the eastern side of the property. It was a grazing field so large, it stretched over gently rolling land beyond the horizon. Inside the entrance gate to the field were three enormous stacks of hay, further on, a cluster of old fruit trees. As we approached the gate, we passed a tiny house. According to the farmer, a widow, her small daughter and her father lived there. Originally from Charleroi these people had come here after the woman's husband had been killed in the war.

We moved along the fence, replacing rotten posts and repairing wire.

Later, I went to the tiny house to ask for a glass of water. The woman offered me a cup of "coffee" instead. She was very friendly and told me that she felt sorry for me for having to work for the stingiest farmer in the country. I had to admit, that although this was my first day, I had already noticed a certain lack of generosity on the part of my employers. Indeed, I barely swallowed the coffee when the farmer came looking for me.

My working day lasted till nine in the evening when work was stopped and I washed and ate. By that time, my body throbbed with pain and my hands trembled.

On other farms, the routines seemed to be less exacting. When I was done cleaning the stalls in the morning, other hands from other farms would walk by, still clean, on their way to church. And by seven o'clock in the evening, after dinner, freshly shaven, dressed in suits, they would "go out".

Not that I wanted to go to mass or thought of going out. After all, I was hiding and hoped not to be noticed. Besides, I didn't have good clothing and could not have dressed up if I wanted to, but I surely would have appreciated a shorter workday.

I hoped that before long, my body would get used to the new rigors imposed on it.

As I already mentioned, the food was very simple. But it was adequate and good. After dinner, tired as I was, I would feel better and relaxed. By the time we had eaten, a teacher from a neighboring village would stop by to listen to the BBC with us. This we did regularly; that is, we listened to the news, never to music. No one seemed to be interested in music! There did not seem to be any humor either. I had never known people so uninterested in laughter. True, the milking woman would at times pound the table with a well developed fist and make some coarse or even interesting remark, but when she did, she seemed to be talking to herself. The Spanish-looking fellow, who worked mostly with the old man, preferred to sit quietly in the darkest corner of the kitchen and roll himself one cigarette after another, adding the odor of bad tobacco to the stale odors of the hot kitchen.

Thus, with an optimistic message from London my day would end. I would excuse myself, go to my room to remove my dusty clothes, wash myself and then my underwear and socks in the small white porcelain washbowl I had been given, and tend to my blisters.

When I finally went to bed, I would thank God that another day had gone by, and that I had a bed to sleep in, and then I would be dead to the world till five a.m.

On my second day on the farm, I already cleaned the stalls by myself. My shoes had been all but ruined on the first day. I had reluctantly put on the wooded shoes, (sabots), made available to me. These, I might add, are doubtless one of man's lesser inventions. They are heavy and inflexible and cut into sore feet with great zest. To trip or stumble with them was a special torture.

Before I cleaned the calves' stall, I took the calves to the orchard behind the barn for the day. When I untied the horse, and patted it gently on its neck, it would leave for its pasture.

While I maneuvered around the ill-tempered bull, two roosters got into a noisy and bloody fight over some dumb chicken.

After breakfast we went for more hay under the auspices of an overly generous sun.

Then, after a short lunch of fried potatoes and tiny bits of salt bacon, we went back to mending fences.

In the evening, the farmer blindfolded the oversized bull, then led it with an iron bar, fastened to its nostrils by an iron ring, to a little cow that was the sole possession of an old, obviously poor woman.

The bull's brief but violent pleasure cost the woman fifteen francs. No guarantee was given as to results.

Slowly, but noticeably I got accustomed to my new life. The labor, the sores, the blisters and the aches were a price I was paying for safety and food. Pretty soon, the only thing that really bothered me was the toilet, which consisted of a bucket under a bottomless chair in a tiny, fly infested wooden enclosure in the orchard. That it was functional was absolutely the only thing that could be said for it.

On the first rainy morning we had, I became acquainted with the cows. The farmer, who usually took them to their pasture, decided that morning that he could stay inside and I could really do that job too. Which, as he explained to me, was a simple and rather pleasant chore.

For one thing, the cows knew their way, and for another, there was Mizette, the dog trained to keep them in line, keep the them from meandering off the road into fields where they liked to nibble forbidden grasses: those of the neighbors.

First, the cows had to be untied. That proved to be dangerous to me, because as soon as one felt itself freed, it turned to run outside, and I needed all my agility to avoid being gored and, or trampled.

Having survived, armed with a stick and Mizette, I followed the mooing milk-givers, and must say that all went well for the first one hundred yards or so. By that time, the lead cow had decided to test my authority by walking brazenly off the road to nibble some clover. The others came to a halt and turned to see what I was going to do. I could have sworn they were smiling. Remembering my instructions, I called on Mizette. The dog wagged her tail and barked at me.

Rain was coming down in buckets. Soaked to the skin, I was in no mood for fun and games. But the dog thought otherwise, and defied my efforts to have her do her job. She barked at me a few times, or was she laughing? Then she turned around and ran back to the farm. There was nothing left for me to do but to chase the offender in person. However, as soon as I started running, all the cows ran, so that I still was behind all of them.

Most were in the field now enjoying the neighbor's clover. Only a dumb greenhorn would try to run in the mud with wooden shoes. I didn't get very far. After picking myself up, I continued bare-footed.

Then I had the good idea of throwing rocks at the recalcitrant creatures, but this disturbed them only when I happened to hit their ankles. We progressed slowly while I improved my aim.

Then I discovered that when I barked like an angry dog, the cows were startled and hurried back to the road to a perfect marching order, until they realized that there really was no dog, and then we started all over again.

The pasture was three quarter of a mile from the farm. When we finally got there, the cows, having had their fun, ran happily through the gate and I happily closed it behind them.

On my way back to the farm, despite the rain, I couldn't help but admire the beauty of the rolling land.

In the meantime, the morning milk had been de-creamed and thinned with water. It stood in filthy buckets in the cow stall, and the cats and the flies were having their breakfast. One of the kittens, driven by its lust for milk, would fall into one of the buckets with great regularity. But then the agonizing cries of its mother would invariably bring someone to the rescue. A few times it was I who grabbed the tip of the kitten's tail sticking from the milk and pull it to safety.

Several buckets of that milk went to the convent next door. The nuns were regular customers. Very friendly, they seemed especially fond of King Leopold III. At least he was their main subject of conversation with outsiders. The mere mention of his name would bring tears to their pious eyes. In view of the fact that these ladies were already wed to the King of Kings, I found their infatuation with Leopold a trifle strange.

Perhaps my favored chore was spreading cow dung. True, this work had its unpleasant aspects. Worst perhaps were the flies that landed on my perspiring back whenever I bent down to pick up a shovel of the stuff, but they would buzz off with much ado when I straightened out to spread it. The great thing about the job was the vast expanse of the sun-drenched land, a majesty of nature no artist can ever hope to fully capture, a beauty and a peacefulness which at times moved me to tears.

On the evening of the first of June, the school teacher came late for his visit. Pale and disheveled, he told us that the Germans had raided his village after quietly surrounding it. There had been no escape for anyone, and several young men had been taken away. That this happened only a couple of miles from Wavreille, relieved me at once of the feeling of security I had cherished since I came here.

The next morning, while loading rocks on the wagon in a field, my otherwise word-starved boss spoke at great length of the raid. He speculated on the possibility of having such a raid at Wavreille, and told me that he suspected I was not on the best terms with the occupant. He himself was friendly with partisans in the region who depended on the farmers for food, but in case of a raid, he would be unable to help me.

My new experience, the new surrounding, the work and the promising news from the BBC had rebuilt my morale, but I missed my friends, and now I felt terribly lonely. My clothes were ruined, I was out of cigarettes, almost out of money, and my boss suspected me. Well, why not? Who else would work fifteen hours a day for a steady diet of milk soup, saltpork sprinkled fried potatoes and bread? Sure I could eat to my heart's content, but I worked the nourishment off fast.

The mayor of Wavreille, whose farm was right next to ours, although related to my employer, was a genuinely friendly person, who had a phone. And, though I knew that unfriendly ears would be listening, I asked him for permission to call Brussels.

Andrée's melodious voice was like nectar to my starving heart. And how smart she was! She asked no questions except regarding my health.

After the phone call, I went to my room and counted the money I had left. To my relief there was still a little more than needed for a trip to Brussels. I thought that if I was going to be in jeopardy here as well as there, I might as well be where my friends were. I put some money in my pocket and went to look for cigarettes, venturing into the village for the first time. So far, I had not left the farm, not even to go to church. But then I worked till noon on Sunday. Still, I was sure that the people in the village knew of my presence.

In a neatly kept street, I entered a small store where a pretty redhead seemed to be waiting for business behind a marble-topped counter. Hesitatingly, I asked her for a pack of cigarettes while her vivid eyes inspected me critically. She asked me for ration stamps and shrugged when I told her that I didn't have any.

"No stamps, no cigarettes", she said with finality. Disappointed, I turned to leave, but when I was at the door she asked me if I was from around the village someplace. I nodded and told her where I worked. Her face lit up with a smile only Rubens could have painted.

"You have to forgive my mistrust," she said putting a pack of cigarettes on the counter, "whenever you want some more, come back."

(During times of war, be a farmer, own a grocery store or at least run a tobacco shop.)

The next morning, the old man needed me and the horse, and I was sent to fetch the latter from its pasture to which it had already gone.

The horse, very obedient, followed my instructions almost eagerly. It was as if it liked me and wanted to be my friend. With the calves I got along well also. At first, I had an awful time getting them from the orchard back to their stable, but soon all I had to do was to go to the edge of the orchard, play a sad song on my mouth-organ, and the calves would gather around me, tears in their eyes, then follow me meekly. When I had troubles with them, the farmer and the dog just stood around laughing. Now they gawked in disbelieve. I must admit, I never learned to tie the calves up. Regardless of my efforts and of what I tried, I always finished by calling the old man who, cursing like a mad Turk, tied them to their places. If a calve didn't want to move, it didn't. That was all there was to it.

Now I walked to the horse's pasture, and into it far enough so that it could see me. I called and it came running, moving quite gracefully for a creature of its bulk and size.

We took off on the poorly sprung, old and rickety wagon. The old man was at the reins, the "Spaniard" and I clang to the conveyance in the back. Maybe the ride over the unpaved roads was good for one's kidneys, but I was glad when we reached the highway and stayed on its smooth asphalt until we came to a large green meadow. We crossed on foot to a stand of trees on its other side, where a half dozen trees had been felt and stripped. The smallest of the trunks was at least fifteen feet long and eighteen inches across.

The horse was hitched to one trunk at the time and stoically dragged it to the wagon. I wondered how we would get the tree trunks on the wagon, but the old man had it all planned. He spit in his hands, and with me grabbed one end of a trunk, and cursing and sweating freely, we lifted it while the third man jammed a long iron bar under the other end to keep it from rolling.

Once one end was leaning against the wagon, I went to the other end to lift it with the help of the "Spaniard" who pushed upwards with the iron bar, while the old man encouraged me with a flow of invectives. It seemed to me I also heard angels sing, when with a final effort we rolled our burden onto the wagon.

After each successful loading we rested for a few minutes.

The last trunk almost squashed my left hand between it and the wagon's edge. As it was, I pulled my hand out in time, not however, without leaving some skin behind, while the old man, in his inimitable prose, commented dryly on my carelessness.

By the time the tree trunks were unloaded in front of the farm, I stumbled around like a drunk. In my ears were echoes of non-existing waterfalls and red spots danced madly before my eyes. My body ached and burned from one end to the other and my hand was a mess. But the day was not over. Already, the old man had found enough energy left in him to assemble a large electric saw at the barn door to cut the trunks into manageable size. Eventually, the remaining stumps were to be chopped up for use in the kitchen stove and the oven in the barn, where bread was baked once a week.

Finally, there was but one tree trunk left. The old man asked me to get it from the barn yard to the barn. It was over six feet long and at least two in diameter. My left hand was a rather useless clump of pain by now, so I hugged the stump with my right arm to drag it, but made little progress. The old man stood nearby, cap pushed to the back of his head, grinning. That I was furious didn't help much. Every few steps I had to stop and gasp for air while the old man cursed and spit. Finally, he pushed his cap further back and told me that he would show me how to work. With that he lifted the stump with one arm and walked with it into the barn!

"I don't understand," he shouted, not even out of breath, "why an eighteen year old can't do what a eighty-three year old can!" Humiliated as I was, I didn't tell him I was twenty.

Sunday the 4th of June, 44, I got up earlier than usual. Having received permission to visit Villers sur Lesse, I wanted to make sure I would have enough time to do what I had planned.

There was a Trappist Monastery near Rochefort, "St. Remy's", which I wanted to visit. I had heard of it during one of the rare discussions I had with the farmer who, I discovered, in spite of being generally close-mouthed, liked to talk about God. He fancied that he knew a great deal about God. All one has to do is to suggest to these types that one knows little about the creator, and they will tell all about "him".

Anyway, considering the raid on the nearby village, I felt that there was no good reason for me to stay in Wavreille. I was going to do some thinking and looking around. Walking across the countryside, one could do both. Even if I had to stay in the area now for one reason or another, I might be able to find work on a farm where I would be better off than where I was now. My present employment would soon reduce me to a wreck, and a naked one at that. My clothing was rapidly disintegrating. The milking women, who also did the laundry, washed my trousers and shirt, but I could not afford to replace these. My employers would not, that was certain. They didn't even give me a glass of milk unless I begged for one, even though we collected 150 to 170 quarts daily. We never ate eggs, though the chickens dropped them all over the place. Some were stepped on, but the rest was sold on the black-market. The starving men who were hiding in the woods would come to the farm and pay one dollar and twenty-five cents for one pound of flour. I suspect these were the people the farmer claimed to be his friends.

When I left Villers, (was it just barely one week ago?) the colonel told me that he would be in touch with me in a few days. I knew him involved with the underground, and hoped now more than ever that he would consider using me in one of its activities.

Another reason why I wanted to return to Villers, was to find out, if the men who had promised me new IDs had been able to get these for me.

When I left, before five, the only person I saw was the milking woman who waved at me from the doorsteps of her small home as I walked by. The sun was already rising through a gray mist that promised a hot and cloudless day, but as yet it was rather cool and I felt wonderful in spite of my sore left hand. For one day I was going to be free.

The road went downhill almost steadily until it reached Rochefort. Unencumbered by luggage, I was walking was easy. Actually, I would have preferred to go by bicycle, but the farmer had refused to lend me his old clunker.

He had also refused to buy my pocket field glasses which I had offered for a ridiculous small sum to get some spending money since I had not been offered any food to take on my trip.

Rochefort had a German Air Force ack-ack detachment which had not been visible before. Now I saw a small cannon on a military vehicle at one of the major road intersections.

The colonel had warned me not to call on Margit, but it occurred to me that I might catch a glimpse of her at the church.

The church was crowded with people in their Sunday finery. I felt conspicuous and ill at ease in my worn attire. The chanting was restful, but I could not spy Margit, and finally convinced she was not there, I left and took the road to the monastery. It was narrow and wound itself by peaceful looking homes and flower-dotted gardens nestled in green woods.

By now it was getting hot and I was plagued by thirst. At a very high, well-trimmed hedge the road forked and I didn't know which fork to take. Suddenly, I heard a girl and a boy laughing gaily, calling a playful dog. They were behind the hedge in a beautiful garden wrapped colorfully around a lovely home. Well-dressed children and a dog were chasing a ball on a carpet-like green lawn. Having discovered me, the dog barking hysterically rushed to me, followed by the giggling girl scolding the dog. When she saw me she was obviously startled, and the fear in her face discouraged me from asking for water. Instead I asked the child for the way to the monastery.

It was the road to the left which soon joined a larger one, and where it did, there stood a good size marble sculpture of Christ and Mary and some other holy ancestor of mine. I could now see the monastery sitting peacefully amid closely planted trees. It was surrounded by a thick and high wall, the monks had thoughtfully erected between themselves and the world. Walking along the wall, I considered already the possibility of having to climb it from the inside, and concluded that this would be next to impossible.

To the right of the road was a small and very peaceful pond, where white swans glid majestically on the dark, still water. It was a picture from a fairy tale except for a small weather-beaten wooden sign that prohibited fishing.

The entrance to the monastery, next to its charming hostelry, was bolted from within. A clear sound from the bell brought a young monk to the gate whose red-brown beard was the same color as his ankle-long frock. On his head, a small round cover, exactly like a yarmulke worn by us Jews, maintained a precarious balance over his wide and friendly face.

I expressed my desire to see the Abbot, and was guided to a room in the hostelry to await the encounter.

No one could have found a speck of dust here. Of medieval origin, walls and ceilings exposed much time-mottled timber. Colored engravings on the walls recounted the monastery's earlier days. From the room, I found myself in, one door led to a dining room, another, partly glass, to a kitchen. From there, rich odors of cooking came, reminding me that I was hungry. In the kitchen, a lively monk maneuvered pots on a very large oven. From it, puffs of steam arose to cut through the beams of sunlight that flooded the scene.

The monk who had greeted me at the gate, returned to inform me that the Abbot would send for me in a little while, and I began to wonder what I was going to tell him. Should I attempt to join the Trappists? A beard, a shaved head and security? I knew that the church was neutral towards the occupant. To reveal my true identity and my dilemma would only get me back on the dusty road in a hurry.

How much longer would the war go on? How much longer could I remain in Wavreille? Could I find another farmer to work for? Even if I did, I could hardly hope to find a haven. Also, it was dangerous to ask around.

My rueful reflections were interrupted by a small, slender monk who came at me with short hurried steps. His sharply sculptured head leaned to his right as if he were intensely listening, and from behind thick glasses blinked amused small eyes. His attire was not brown, but black and white. His face was shaven and his head had been spared the razor. He was a father not a brother. Somehow, he reminded me of Margit's uncle Simon.

The father introduced himself as the concierge, and added that he came to take me to the Abbot. I followed him through a large open court, decorated by a colorful geometrically designed flower garden exuding rich perfumes which mingled strangely with the odor of beer coming from one of the buildings surrounding the court. I was led through a delightful arcade. Behind it were orderly rows of a green vegetable garden. The clock on the modest tower that saddled the roof of the hostelry rang the time.

Walking beside my guide, I had to lean towards him as he told me in a whisper that I was to bend my knee and kiss the red-stoned ring on my host's right hand when meeting him. I did not like the idea, but I was in no condition to challenge Trappist tradition.

In a long, cool hall with a gray ceramic tile floor and richly decorated walls, we sat on an ancient wooden bench. Signs lettered carefully in an old text, reminded one of silence. Two brothers walked slowly by, communicating by sign-language. Mute, the poor devils, I thought.

The large oak door facing us produced a monk who made some signs to my guide. Another mute one, I thought - and so young.

My companion whispered that I was to enter. Walking through the door I found myself in a large, comfortable office of a charming dignity provided by well maintained ancient furniture.

My host came towards me making a sweeping sign of the cross while I went through the formality of kissing the sizable ring on the hand he tended.

Even though this man was doubtlessly accustomed to authority, he never the-less had a friendly countenance. The large, gold crucifix, hanging from his neck, lent a superb sparkle to his rich red and white attire.

He offered me a chair, facing his on the other side of a heavy and hand carving enriched desk, and looked at me expectantly.

I told him that I had come for a visit because I had heard many good things about the St. Remy Trappists, and because there was a possibility I would enter monastic life, I wanted to become acquainted with their ways.

He smiled, and with a rather thin voice told me that I should have to give the matter much thought. I claimed that I had done so already, and he wanted to know whether or not I was on good terms with the Germans and had no obligations to any member of the opposite sex.

My answers seemed satisfactory. I was already congratulating myself on how well the interview was going when he asked me about my hometown, and innocently I told him that it was Antwerp. At that his face lit up with renewed liveliness for he hailed from Antwerp also, and to my dismay he began to speak Flemish.

After more relevant questions, such as whether or not I had been duly baptized, he returned once more to the subject of females, but I seemed to satisfy him on that account when I told him that my fiancée had been killed during a bombardment.

That I was an artist painter pleased him much. Most all professions were represented at St. Remy, but an artist painter they did not have just then.

The monks, I learned, tried to be self-sufficient by producing most everything they needed, including their own electricity. As far as my future was concerned, I was to think about it. In the meantime, I was welcome to come to the monastery for a trial period, a retreat.

I was pleased with the interview. It seemed that my Flemish had not betrayed me, and I had the promise for several days of safety.

The friendly doorkeeper took charge of me again with a wide smile. He proudly showed me the Abbey's beautiful marble chapel, located next to the Abbot's office. It had been designed and built by the monks. (See page 283 of original diary.)

On the way back to the hostelry, its function to serve and house guests was explained. Also, an invitation extended to me to stay for lunch was very gratefully accepted. The monks we saw all communicated in sign-language. When I expressed my surprise at this, my guide, thoroughly amused, explained that these people were not mute, but had taken an oath of silence and could only speak with strangers. The opportunity for brothers to do so was rare, because only fathers occupied themselves with guests and had contacts with the community at large.

The lunch could easily be claimed the best meal I had since the beginning of the war four years ago. The baked chicken and the buttered peas spoke in glowing terms of the chef's skills, and the white bread, the marvelous beer, made the occasion something of a dream for me.

I shared the table with a country priest and two wilted old ladies whose stiff conversation did not fail to amuse me. I also cursed my modesty which kept me from accepting a second helping of chicken after the other guests had declined.

On the road again, I concluded a monks life wasn't all that bad, after all.

Villers was still very far. Before leaving Wavreille, I had studied a map and now I took as many shortcuts as I could. Through forests and across fields, uphill and downhill I walked, through the villages of Humain and Buissonville, and other lesser ones. The dust and the burning sun knew no pity. In the villages, people would stop and stare at me until I was out of sight. At some isolated farms I stopped and asked for work, but no one seemed to be in need of help. An elderly, obese farmer's wife offered me "coffee" and confided that if I were female, she would hire me at once, considering that she had six unwed sons.

Just off one of the roads, I found an abandoned house and stopped to look it over. At one time it may have been a small hotel. Trash and broken bottles littered the basement. Upstairs, the rooms were empty and stripped.

It would not be a good place to hide. The Germans and everyone else were surely keeping an eye on it.

When I finally reached Villers, I found out that the Colonel was in Brussels and that his wife was in a bad mood. Lizette was not present. Madame did have the new IDs for me, (see page 289 of the original diary), and also some cigarettes, a gift from Andrée.

I wrote a few lines to Andrée which the Colonel would take to Brussels on his next trip, then said hello to Edward, Josée and Loise, and left to get back to Wavreille.

Madame had not invited me to stay over night. As a matter of fact, I was disappointed that she had not offered any hospitality, not even a glass of water. Well, my delight with my new ID had made the trip worth while.

As soon as I was on my way, I studied it carefully. It was not as good as my old one, because the new Henri Girard did not really exist. I was now a resident of Antwerp, and my new birthday of February 2, 1926 made me two years younger. My new birthplace was the city of Maline: Mechelen in Flemish. Also, I had now a certificate of employment with the Metal Works of Hoboken. What was especially nice about the work certificate, was that I could use it with the old or the new ID.

There was a village fair in Eprave. Young people, handsome in their colorful local costumes, were dancing in the streets and on the bridge over the Lesse. Brilliant colors in the warm afternoon glow of the sun.

I had no time to waste, no time to watch the unusual event. Instead, I took a path I thought would provide a shortcut to Wavreille via the village of Han sur Lesse. To my dismay, the path soon disappeared, and walking on the uneven ground of the fields slowed me down.

Evening came quickly, and with it black clouds driven by gusts of cool, humid wind, bending tall grasses in rapid uneven waves, rustling trees and bushes. In no time it was dark and rain began to fall in large drops. It was a fine time to get lost. There was no light anywhere, no building in sight; only tall waving bushes which insisted on getting in my way.

Already, I was soaked to the skin. The ground under my feet had become treacherous mud. I slipped and fell repeatedly. Little streams of water ran down my neck, over my back and legs. At each step my feet seemed to glue themselves to the deepening mud. Howling, the wind blew the rain through the drenched darkness. My watch had stopped and I lost the sense of time.

I climbed a hill, hoping to get my bearing, but in the dark hardly anything could be seen, except on the horizon I noticed evenly spaced trees, such as are found along roads and highways, and I headed to them.

There was a highway all right, with Vicinal tracks on one side, an indication to me that I was somewhere between Rochefort and Han sur Lesse. Rochefort would be to my left. Or was it? I decided to turn left. It was unlikely that I was on the other side of Rochefort.

It certainly was good to be on a road again, one that went downhill yet.

At a road crossing I came upon a cluster of forbidding looking houses, black against the furious sky, reminiscing of a scene in a horror movie. At the bottom of a tall cliff, near the buildings, stood a road-sign stretching its well-meaning arms into the darkness. Cursing myself for not having my flashlight with me, I eventually managed to decipher the sign by the occasional electrical flare-ups in the sky, and assured that I was on the right way I went on. The downpour didn't want to diminish. Water ran over me to my toes to squirt onto the pavement, while the wind, whining and whistling dolefully, whipped the trees.

Finally, I recognized the black silhouettes of the houses now along the road, and soon I found the highway to Wavreille.

At times I stumbled off the road against bushes or trees. Sometimes I thought I heard a dog howl. Noises and shadows danced around me. I stopped to listen, feeling that there was someone behind me. But I couldn't hear anything over the rush of the wind and the rain, and went on. It had become so dark, I couldn't see my hand when I held it to my face. The trees along the road were but black masses on black, to be heard rather than to be seen.

It certainly was ridiculous to be afraid in a dark, stormy night. There probably was no safer place for a Jew in the Christian world. But, I could not rid myself of the notion that someone was behind me. A dog howled suddenly, crazily near me.

I tried to humor myself, but the harder I tried the more I became afraid. A crackle next to me startled me, but it was only a door in a wooden fence. Shouldn't I be in Wavreille by now? How many hours had I been walking? There was a chance that I had missed the road that led from the highway to the village. The possibility that I was lost again began to chew on my weary nerves. Rain came down steadily, but it bothered only my face.

I stopped again, listen to the dark behind me and shivered. Surely if it were suddenly quiet, I would hear my teeth rattle. How silly to imagine that someone was following me in this weather.

I was about to go on, when a man pulling a bicycle nearly knocked me down. He saw me just in time. Or had he seen me all along? Hold-ups and robberies did happen on the roads at night. I was too startled to say anything, and for a moment we just stood there. Then he said, or rather shouted over the wind, "Good evening". I managed to return the salute, and to ask where the road was leading.

"You are on the right road," he said. We had to shout to hear each other, and I thought that he was laughing. We started walking side by side. "We will be in Wavreille soon", he added.

I had not recognized the man nor his voice, but his voice was strong, warm and friendly. From what he had said, he must have recognized me.

"Are you going to Wavreille?" I asked cautiously.

"Don't tell me that you don't recognize me!" He seemed a little hurt. I apologized, and he told me that he knew me from sight, having seen me work at the Mayor's brother in-law's farm. He himself worked for his uncle in Wavreille, but only for the duration of the war.

After what he said, I felt more comfortable with him.

"For me too, it's just for the duration," I ventured.

"That I can easily imagine," he said, "the people you work for are believed to be the worst to work for in the country."

When we separated in front of the village church, we shook hands and wished each other the best of luck.

I had something to think about. Considering the reputation my employer had, anyone working for him would have to be desperate. Everyone in the village knew! Obviously there were no Nazis in Wavreille, or the Spaniard and I would have been picked up by now.

The old woman was still up and let me in. It was not quite midnight. She didn't offer me anything to eat or to drink. I went to my room, removed my clothes, wrung it out and hung it in the open window to dry, dried myself and hurried into the bed. It would have been sheer luxury had it been but one foot longer. Outside, the storm was finally letting up.

In the morning, dressed in my half-dry clothes, I resumed my chores at 5:30. I knew it was five o'clock when the milking woman arrived at the stall under me.

At breakfast the old man complained that I had left the day before, without cleaning the stables! Then he asked me to trim the hedge around the orchard.

Trimming the hedge was the only job I did on the farm the old man complimented me for. He was amazed at my ability to trim evenly and straight.

The morning of Tuesday the 6th of June, was cloudless, still and mild. I had taken the cows to their pasture, and coming back to the farm, I saw the large bulk of the milking woman dancing and jumping grotesquely by the mound of hay in front of the farm building.

'Good God!' I thought, *'She has lost her mind!'*

When she saw me, she rushed to me, grabbed me by the shoulder and shook me, shouting: "What do you say now, buddy? What do you say now?"

The unusual exercise of her heavy frame had caused her to be covered with pearls of sweat. She swung me around in a hopping dance, and I thought a brick must have fallen on her head.

"What happened? What is it?" I shouted, trying to stay on my feet as we whirled about. She stopped swinging for a moment and glared at me, her shiny black eyes bulging surprise: "What happened? What? You don't know?" she shrieked in my face, "My dear! Oh my dear! They have landed! They have landed!"

Letting go of me, she danced away to the rhythm of her happy heart, laughing, arms stretched out, swinging her large body.

I stood there lamely and dazed, watching her, wondering why I did not explode with joy like she had, then forgetting my wooden shoes, I nearly broke my neck racing to the radio in the kitchen.

Over the wavy rasping noise of German interference a voice could be heard giving the news in a Slavic tongue. No one else was yet about as I listened without understanding. However, soon an announcer spoke in German. The message was short, but the words were those I had been waiting for, for an eternity.

"Allied Forces, under the command of General Eisenhower landed early this morning in Normandy on the European Continent."

The message was then repeated in French and other languages.

Normandy was not very far! Well, much closer than Stalingrad, Kiev or Rome. If all went well, Allied Forces could be in Belgium in no time.

Slowly, a strange elation seeped through me. It was such a serene, such a beautiful morning, it seemed all but impossible that a scant 300 miles away a gigantic battle was raging, a struggle that could well be the most decisive of the war.

How many people had waited for this? The whole countryside seemed permeated with new life. The air seemed purer, vibrant with unseen electricity.

In the afternoon, flying fortresses flew over us. Small silver dots, high in the blue sky, trailing bands of white steam.

My employer, with the help of the "Spaniard", began to dig a bomb shelter. In the orchard, behind the barn, it became a Z shaped ditch, three feet wide and over six deep, covered with solid railway ties and one foot of dirt.

I wished for contact with partisans. I didn't know if I could kill a German or bomb a train, but I did want to be a part of the fight. I had a lot of bitterness and anger in me that was not satisfied by running and hiding or tending to farm animals.

But I was an outsider, someone to be mistrusted. My efforts of making contact got nowhere. I even went to church one evening; it was not easy to get permission, my labors were so needed. There I was, in a dark and unattractive edifice bare and devoid of the customary decor.

I wanted to meet somebody. People stared at me, nodded, but avoided speaking to me.

By Sunday, I had decided to go to the monastery for a trial period, hoping that by the time it would be over, the Allies would have reached us.

Again, I took the day off, went to the monastery to declare my intention, then to Villers where I hoped to have a chance to talk with the Colonel. Again he was not home, and his wife was in such an ugly mood, I refrained from telling her about the retreat I was planning at the monastery, and left as soon as I could to get back to the farm.

This time I stuck to the highway and reached Wavreille without trouble before the day was out.

The farmer was happy when I told him I would leave his employ the next morning. He claimed that he had not had one night of good sleep since I had come. To show his appreciation, he gave me five francs, about ten US. cents. It would have taken fifteen francs to buy an egg from him. I thanked him anyway. After all he had given me shelter.

I was in good spirits when I left the farm behind me. My clothes and my shoes had been ruined, but my suitcase was much lighter.

Once in Rochefort, I wanted to see Margit, and after some hesitation, I rang the bell at her place of hiding which the Colonel had revealed to me when in one of his talkative moods. She opened the door herself, and we were happy to see each other. To her employer, she introduced me as her cousin. Then, after a few minutes with her at the door, I left to avoid arousing suspicion and further questions.

At the monastery, the concierge father led me to a room in a building housing men on retreat. The room was simple and Spartan, but spotless. It had running cold water and a large window that opened onto a garden where the flour mill and the generator plant were located. There was still some time till lunch, and I had been advised that I might go for a short walk in the garden and then to church. I did both.

The garden was very beautiful, and the church service, permeated by the Gregorian chanting of eighty monks accompanied by a mellow organ was more than just charming.

From the balcony I had a perfect view of the church's interior. Everything in it seemed to have been considered worthy of efforts to make it precious. The pews were of hand-carved time-darkened wood, the hymnals, large volumes, hand written on parchment, and on the walls were paintings of saints of significance to the Trappists.

Along the sides, and the back wall of the sanctuary were the usual paintings of the "Stations of the cross". Small and colorful.

After the service, conducted with much pomp, an older brother offered to escort me to the dining room.

It was a bright if simple place, still the most unusual dining room I had ever been to. (See page 293 of original diary). The wooden ceiling was criss-crossed by an array of exposed heavy wooden beams, and the floor was shiny wooden planks. The lower part of the walls were wood also and had benches attached to them. Otherwise, the walls were light and bare, decorated by three large religious paintings on the side of the room where the head-table was. At the opposite end was a richly carved elevated wooden pulpit. The half dozen iron columns supporting the ceiling, painted though they were, had an obvious functional purpose. But they were definitely part of the character of the room. Small, individual benches for those who came to eat were stored under plain large tables.

The monks entered, washed their hands at a sink conveniently located near the door, then went to their places and stood there in silence, waiting for all to arrive. A tall, bespectacled father, who reminded me of my uncle Kobi (Jacob), led me to a place at the end of one of the tables which was to be mine. The dining utensils consisted of a wooden bowl, a tin cup, a wooden spoon and fork. There was also a bottle of vinegar, one of water, and a nameplate at each place. My said "Novice".

After the Abbot (Father Superior) and his adjutant arrived, the monks bending forward, put their hands on their knees, said a prayer then sat down. Two brothers carried food in a large pot from table to table. Pausing at each place they bowed silently, and each man filled his bowl according to his appetite. While this was going on, a father climbed the steps to the pulpit and began to read stories from an enormous book about life at the monastery. These were humorous stories, read in Latin laced with Flemish. I understood little, but the stories caused much merriment among the monks.

One story, read entirely in Flemish, was about a woman who had come to the monastery disguised as a man. She had been exposed in this dining room by a clever monk who had thrown an apple in her lap. Like a woman would, she separated her legs to catch it. A man would have pulled them together.

In the meantime, I regretted that I had refused an earlier offer to take my meals at the hostelry. But, I wanted to find out how the monks lived, and already I could say that food meant little to them. Their meals consisted mostly of potatoes, beans and a third vegetable and a tin cup of water. Salt seemed to be the only flavoring. No meat, fat or eggs. But, when one is starving most everything is delicious.

After lunch I went for another walk to acquaint myself with the grounds. I felt it necessary to know all the walks and buildings well. There was a "new" complex of buildings and an old one. The old one dated from 1230AD. Between these was a large well-kept vegetable garden, and there were trimmed trees around a small round pond into which water spouted from four cement masks of angel faces embedded in its concrete rim. It was sunny and peaceful, an ideal atmosphere for thinking and meditating.

An older monk approached. He was tall, rounded, the owner of watery pale blue eyes which blinked comically from behind small but thick glasses. A benevolent smile on his broad face not only made him appear happy, but also made him sympathetic; the kind of person one likes to meet. No priest could have wished for a finer baritone: "My child, are you the one who came today?"

I nodded, introduced myself, and he asked me to call him Father Emmanuel. Then he expressed his hope that he had not interrupted me at some important meditation, but it was his responsibility to look after new-comers. He had seen me walking and hoped I would allow him to join me to answer any questions I might have about St. Remy.

It turned out that he was the one with the questions and I was doing most of the answering. He wanted to know about my family, my background, and friends. I was prepared for this, but suspecting that a trained interlocutor could detect untruth by pressing for details, I kept asking questions myself to slow and detract him.

We reached an enclosure of a wire mesh fence behind which rabbit, pigs and fowl were kept. Father Emmanuel informed me these were destined for the table at the hostelry.

At a statue of Marie we halted.

"And now, my child, let us pause and thank the good mother of God for having brought you this way, and ask her to let her grace shine on us always."

Emmanuel crossed himself, and I followed his example. His lips moved to a silent prayer. I tried the same, realizing that I had some quick learning to do. My Hebrew prayer was out of place here for sure.

At the cemetery the wall was lower than elsewhere. One could see the land outside: shades of green to the horizon. Tucked away among lofty trees, this resting place could doubtlessly soften the hardest spirits. The tree-filtered sunlight danced over the small white wooden crosses, solemn on the rich green of carefully tended grass. On the crosses was the Latin name of the departed and the date of death only, which according to father Emmanuel was their birthday in heaven.

The hushed silence that reigned here was only broken by the discrete chatter of occasional birds and the soft rustling of trees.

One grave was open, ready to receive the next monk, and each considered it possibly his.

Supper consisted of beans, peas, cheese, syrup and bread. After eating, the monks returned to the sanctuary for evening service which lasted till nine. When they left the house of worship, walking in a single file, each monk was blessed with "holy water" by a priest at the door.

The monks retired for the night, and I did likewise.

Almost asleep, I was startled by the flapping of wings and the twittering of a bird. A swallow had come through the open window, and unimpressed by my presence, settled on the curtain-rod and went to sleep.

Shocked from deep sleep by a rapping on my door, I jumped from the bed and fumbled into my clothes. It took me a few moments to remember where I was. Heart pounding in my ears, I asked what was wanted, but received only more knocking for an answer. When I opened the door, a brother stood before it. Arms crossed over his chest, he bowed deeply and said something about going to mass. It was a quarter to three and it was cold.

Mass began at three and lasted till six. The monks' melancholic chanting and the soft organ music would have put me back to sleep if my knees had not complained so vehemently about the wooden floor I was kneeling on. Switching from one to the other, and sitting back on my heels did little to alleviate my discomfort.

"Per omnia secula seculorum..." The priest who conducted the service had a thin, trembling voice. Perhaps he was freezing too.

Slowly, the lamps over the pews turned paler in the growing daylight. A tiny bell rang three times. The monks threw themselves forward, hiding their faces between their knees.

"I salute you Marie, mother of God, the Lord is with you..."
The organ moaned, the tiny bell rang again and the monks sang on in unison. Over the altar, an eternal light's small flame trembled in its red glass.

It was much like the one in our synagogue in Vienna, so long ago.

My grand-father, Salomon, holding my hand firmly, took me to the kindergarten in the morning. Later in the day, he waited in the nearby park for the kids to come out from the kindergarten. Invariably he kissed me, a broad smile in his well trimmed beard, and distributed figs and dates. In the evening we went to the "shool". All the men there were old and bearded. Wrapped in white prayer-shawls embroidered in silver or gold, the worshipers swayed, each to the rhythm of his prayers. The small red flame over the altar flickered in a mysterious cadence with the large candles standing with great importance in their richly decorated silver candelabras at the altar's sides. The old Jews' plaintive liturgy rumbled through the small room; their beards trembled.

Catechism in hand, I continued to explore the monastery.

There was quite a difference between fathers and brothers. Brothers participated in the services but never led one. The fathers were in charge of spiritual affairs, the brothers of secular chores. Fathers studied, conducted services, run the monastery's economic and social affairs. Some went to villages to officiate at church functions. Brothers kept their mouth shut, worked the land, peeled potatoes and scrubbed floors. They also worked in trades. Tailors, carpenters, and so on. Most impressive was the brewery where, in enormous copper kettles, the famous Trappist beer was made, and where the air was heavy with steaming odors of hops and malt.

Fascinating was the collection of relics, consisting of fragments of bones and whole bones of various saints. These relics were mounted in glass-covered cases on walls in the outer corridor of the church, carefully labeled with the names of their original owner.

Walking in the garden, studying my catechism, I met the concierge. While he inquired about the way I had slept, I noticed that the letters in the mail-pouch he carried, had been opened and censored. This reminded me that I had promised the Abbot, I would write to my mother to ask her for my ration card. And, also that it was known that I had not written as yet.

Well, I had just arrived. Still, I would better write to Andrée. Knowing the girl, I suspected that she would come looking for me if she didn't hear from me soon. That really wouldn't do, considering that my fiancée had supposedly been killed in a bombing. I was not as much concerned about writing to her as I was about the answer I could get.

Then, there also was Colonel Charles Henry, who probably thought me in Wavreille, and who had promised to get in touch with me there.

Having obtained some stationary at the hostelry, I went to my room, rolled myself a cigarette and wrote to Andrée.

I addressed her as my dear mother, and explained that after much soul-searching I had decided to seek fulfillment in a life of prayer and devotion at the monastery, etc. In closing, I asked for her blessing and my ration card. That the letter was addressed to Andrée Girard shouldn't cause a problem because Andrée knew my handwriting.

Father Emmanuel's urging that I should come to confession to him added to my dilemmas because I knew nothing of that ritual. I finally agreed to have confession on June 14., and then managed to have it postponed one day.

I had told the good father that my God-fearing parents had not been on very friendly terms with the church which had kept me for years from its blessings, and also had led to my general lack of familiarity with certain rituals.

The catechism was of no help to me as far as the confessional was concerned, stating only that the good Christian had to have confession and communion at least once a year. I knew however the significance of these acts, and memorized a list of sins for the occasion.

As it turned out, my fears had not been justified. Not only did everything go well, but Father Emmanuel congratulated me afterwards. He said that rarely had he encountered anyone as free of sin as I. My pride was only marred by the prospect of having to go to communion the next morning. I hoped my ancestors would not turn over in their graves.

The monastic routine included a siesta from two to three in the afternoon, and during that time, the community of monks sunk into a deeper than usual silence. When the snoozing was over, all returned to their tasks with renewed liveliness.

Sometimes, between five and six p.m., readings were held in the "Chapitre" room. Those who came to listen, bowed deeply in all directions, arms crossed over their chest, then went to their seats and repeated the greetings before sitting. This was one of the formalities that amused me much. At times, I actually found it difficult to keep a straight face. On the other hand, the monks were visibly amused by my efforts to observe their rules.

The material that was read was not without interest. The subject matter was monastic life in the middle-ages. A subject and period the monks seemed to prefer. They listen attentively in absolute silence to the even and rhythmic voice of the reader, while I, unaccustomed as I was to getting up at a quarter to three, had difficulties staying awake.

The reading was in Flemish. Most of the monks were of Flemish extraction. I wondered why an essentially Flemish organization was located in the heart of Wallonie.

There was a German father whom I disliked and distrusted for no special reason. Naturally, he served as guide to the occasional German visitors, usually German soldiers. The first appearance of such a group disturbed me, but I realized, that while at the monastery, they were in an unagressive frame of mind. They liked to strut around in their inimitable manner, scan the old buildings with field glasses while exclaiming, "Interesting, absolutely interesting." I tried to keep out of sight.

The "Chapitre" room, like most rooms, had paintings on its walls. (See page 301 of original diary). And, though many were of an indifferent quality, some were rather good. Father Emmanuel assured me that should I join the Trappists I would be allowed to paint. I imagined that the subject matter would be rather confined. Yet, I would have my place here like all the others. Like a former businessman, now in charge of Trappist business, the former chef of the hotel Metropol, in Brussels, now cooking for the guests at the hostelry. Father Emmanuel had been a teacher. He joined St. Remy fifty years ago. Since then, he had not made one phone call, had not seen a radio. He didn't remember what money looked like. He asked me to show him some and inspected the bills with great interest. After that, we talked about other more modern conveniences. He concluded, with a broad smile, that apparently, he had not missed all that much by turning his back to earthly treasures.

I was sure that I would miss music and female companionship.

Most monks seemed well adjusted to their existence, some seemed happy. They certainly smiled a great deal more than people on the other side of their wall. Amazingly enough, many were not only relatively young, but also good looking and a few were outright handsome. I had never seen a beautiful nun, and decided women might join religious orders for not quite the same reasons than men.

There was one young novice whose sad red-rimmed eyes betrayed agony.

I found out, he had been promised to a religious life by his parents before he was born, and had been handed over to the monastery as soon as the monks had been willing to take him. Now, at about my age, he was already a Father. I once saw him cry while working in the vegetable garden. I tried to converse with him, but he refused.

As for working in the vegetable garden, I had asked permission to do so, because I wanted some physical activity, but didn't receive an answer to this request.

After the early mass, we had a piece of dry black bread for breakfast with tea, water or "coffee". Then the brothers went to their chores while the fathers went to pursue spiritual quests.

At six thirty a.m., six more masses were held simultaneously at the six altars which stood in a semi-circle under vaulted arches behind the main altar. Above each was a stone sculpture of the saint to which the altar was dedicated. The officiating priests wore different colorful attires each day, depending on the celebrated saint. The attires were kept in a large storage room which sparkled with gold and silver embroidered garments.

I was kneeling behind father Emmanuel on a church stool rather than on the hardwood floor. This to the great relief of my sore knees. Attendance for the 6:30 mass must have been voluntary, because it was rather small. Those present prayed quietly, only occasional disturbed by the rustle of clothes. A brother and I were to have communion. He, kneeling next to me, was praying with great devotion,

I was grateful for his presence. I could follow his example in the ritual and better mask my ignorance. Indeed, everything went well, and afterwards, in his office, father Emmanuel congratulated me. This was a festive occasion, he claimed, considering I had gone a long time without this holy sacrament. To celebrate, he offered me some biscuits.

There was another mass at eleven a.m., at which attendance was not much better than at the earlier mass. But then, most of the monks were at work.

My favored mass was in the evening, when almost all the monks were present and filled the church with the ardor of their chanting in the twilight of the waning day. Two brothers, dressed in white, knelt at the main altar, holding lanterns on black poles.

"Agnus dei qui tolis pecata mundi donna nobis pacem"...

In the shadow on the left side of the front row of pews I was practically out of sight, but had a good view of the service.

The officiating priest spreading his arms wide, turned to the congregation: "Dominus vobiscum." The monks answered in chorus: "Et cum spiritu tuo." Incense spread its bluish haze. The red velvet covering of the altar was gold embroidered. The priest lifted a cross, and the monks hid their faces. A small bell rang timidly.

I could not stay at St. Remy much longer. Naturally enough, there had been no answer from Andrée to my strange letter, and there was no ration card for this Henri Girard. To the Abbot I voiced my surprise at not having heard from my mother, and offered to go to Brussels to talk to her in person.

Actually, I was getting desperate. The Allies had a foothold in Normandie, but the fighting was fierce and the front seemed to get nowhere fast. My Retreat at the monastery was coming to its end as all do after two weeks. To join the monks was really out of the question for me. I just had to find work and shelter elsewhere.

The problems plaguing my mind made it difficult to chat with father Emmanuel, to listen to his tales of souls lost and souls found, and to show some interest. I preferred to walk about the monastery grounds while my mind went in circles trying to find a way out. Thus I became acquainted with the library, and even with the brothers dormitory which consisted of a very large room with roofless cubicles. These cubicles were furnished with an iron bed with a wooden board as a mattress, covered with a blanket, and the picture of a saint on one of the three walls. The fourth wall was a curtain opening to the corridor. Everything was immaculately clean.

Preparations were being made for a festivity. The inner buildings were slowly decorated with gorgeous carpets and with flowers. One carpet, made of yellow flowers led through the church to the altar where it ended in a large circle.

Sitting in my room, I smoked my last cigarette. I was also out of money. Thoughtfully I packed my suitcase. Why drag it around? I would leave it behind. If I managed to get to Brussels, I would not need its contents. If I didn't get there, I wouldn't need them either. In the meantime, the suitcase would be a burden and attract attention.

Leaving the monastery meant leaving safety. I was afraid of the threatening hostility that waited for me on the other side of the wall. But then, everyone's turn had to come sometime. Why should I be spared? Why should life be kinder to me than it had been to the baby Rita or to my mother?

I wrote a letter to aunt Mina in New York. In it I put a photo of Andrée and me made by Polak. (See page 135 of original diary). Among other things, I told her that Margit would in all likelihood survive the war, and I implored her to look for her. Of course, I didn't dare to put Margit's address in the letter. I handed the letter to the father who reminded me of uncle Kobi, and asked him to send it six month after the war, should he not have heard from me by then.

The many flowers used to decorate the monastery permeated it with sweet perfume. Farmers, looking unreal in their finery, had come from the surrounding countryside to participate in the festive service. I too had been handed a candle and walked behind the single file of hooded monks, who, candles in hand, walked behind the Abbot carrying a golden cross at the head of the procession. The baldachin, under which he walked, and his colorful garment, were richly embroidered with silver and gold. The whole affair was as mystical as it was theatrical. Incantations echoed gravely through the dark and somber hallways.

Nervously flickering, the orange flames of the candles moved slowly with their bearers to the sanctuary. Organ music became louder, liberally burnt incense wove a bluish cloud over the assembly. The little bell rang, voices reached for new crescendos. Farmers, obviously moved and slightly bewildered, counted their rosaries assiduously with their knobby, callous-covered fingers.

Having obtained permission to go to Rochefort on an errand, I went to see Margit to tell her that I had been at the monastery and was about to leave. I didn't tell her that I didn't know yet where to go.

On the evening of the 19th. of June, the swallow came to my room as it had each evening, and for the last time I listened to its carefree flutter and tweeting. I was grateful for its friendly company.

The Abbot was really a thoughtful man, a "Mensch". When I bid him farewell, telling him that I still had not heard from my mother and would be going to see her in person, he offered me the money for a railway ticket to Brussels. A boon for my pocket and for my morale.

I also said good-bye to father Emmanuel. He wished me a safe going and a safe coming back, and asked me to write to him should I encounter difficulties. Promising that I would, I left my Brussels address with him.

Very early on the 20th. the concierge saw me off at the gate after having given me a piece of bread for my journey.

All I carried now was my toothbrush, my razor and my paint box, slung over my shoulder with the folding easel tied to it. (I had mixed feelings about the paint box, but eventually decided it could help explain my wandering in the country side, and therefor I kept it with me.)

I resolved to take the road over Humain and Buissonville to Villers sur Lesse. Not that I expected anything from the Colonel, but I felt that I owed him an explanation, and besides, Villers was as good a place to take a train.

The sun came up bright and hot, and on the dusty road it didn't take long before whatever optimism I had evaporated. Occasionally, I stopped to rest, especially after walking uphill for a while. My stay at the monastery seemed to have done little for my stamina. Shortly, my throat became painfully dry.

I went out of my way to call on farmers, but no one was interested in my services. Soon I envied the placid cows stuffing their faces with juicy grass in the fields I passed. Fortunately, at one farm I received a cup of "coffee" from a thoughtful woman who probably guessed me in some sort of predicament.

Having taken a shortcut I became lost in a dense and dark forest. The road ended at a mosquito infested marsh. Attacked by clouds of hungry mosquitoes, I ran and arrived badly bitten and exhausted at the highway where I had started my "shortcut" one hour earlier.

A priest, I encountered, offered me some soup from his lunch basket. I ate it with the bread I had, but the food failed to restore my energy. The paint box hit my leg with each step. The easel kept slipping from it, and I wondered why I had not discarded these now useless objects with my suitcase. But I could not separate myself from them.

Everything stuck to my wet and now itchy skin. Dogs barked at me angrily, and people eyed me suspiciously when I walked by. Only anger and hate kept pushing me on. The sky covered itself with black clouds, thunder rolled in the distance, but it did not want to rain. Resting in tall grass on the top of a gentle hill, I decided not to waste more time hunting for work on farms. No one would want me. That made sense. Or did it? Did anything?

How about the flowers nodding to the whims of the wind, or the butterflies fluttering about to a bitter end of their own? I looked at the panorama before me under the gray blanket of the steaming clouds. Roads cutting through the helpless land went here and there, dispersing now and meeting then again. At the horizon, the earth seemed to melt into the sky. Just clouds that would blow away, water that will evaporate. Life was that way. If life had a purpose, it sure would be nice if I knew.

The beauty of nature was in reality but a thin veneer. Under it there was much ugliness. Why was there beauty? What was it? What was its use? Had not Heine said it all? *"Ah, how useless is my song. Just as useless as love, life, as the creator and his creation."* Well, he too was an immigrant from Germany. That might explain his despair.

I got up and went on.

Still, what was God? Nobody really knew. Not the rabbis, not the monks. Chances were that everybody was wrong. If men could know they would know. Their brain was proportionally limited to that of an ant. So, they couldn't know. Why should there be only one God anyway? If there was a God, then what made for one could have made for others. What a groundless silly obstination: "*Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God is one*". Just what good has it done for Israel?

Trees rustled softly in a gentle breeze and it began to rain. Thunder rolled in the distance. The sky was black, but the storm seemed to focus its fury elsewhere.

I can understand the need for a God. I do. But God is God.

At least, I don't think his business is any of my business. I just am not that vain. And to me it does not make any difference whether God prefers Latin or Hebrew or Chinese. Human language and human ideas about *God* all come from *him*-why not it?- God's creative powers? We will never know. We know what we are supposed to know. Just like birds know where and how to build their nests. Without any body showing them how to do it. They know only what they are supposed to know. Not more, not less. So do we.

Does it matter, whether or not I implore *God* for strength and for mercy? True, I am but dust. But *you* have made me such and in my helplessness I need *you*. *You* have made me need *you.* Why?

I had stopped to quench tears of self-pity. The rain was fine and warm. The clouds were a solid black blanket and it was getting dark. Suddenly, almost directly over me, the clouds parted and from a small speck of azure-blue sky, a shaft of brilliant sunlight streaked through the grayness. Yearningly, my eyes clung to it for the few moments before it vanished.

I recalled an arguments I had with Emil. Of course, there must be a creator, I had claimed. Nothing comes from nothing. If God has created everything, he must be omnipotent. He could be anywhere, hence on this road with me. How come all creatures, with the exception of men, seemed to be happy?

It had not rained much. Just enough to pin the dust down. I came upon the abandoned house, its wall darkened by the rain. I knew that I was not far from Villers.

Madame Henry's long face hinted that she didn't care for my visit. My appearance must have reflected the strain of my walk, but she failed to offer me anything. After a cold inquiry about Wavreille, she returned her attention to Lizette who had been in the kitchen with her when I arrived.

Lizette seemed quite embarrassed. I was sorry that the Colonel was gone again, because I would have liked to talk with him. But at least I could catch my breath and rest for a while before going to the railway station to see about a train.

I sat in a chair and watched the two women talk. How tall and skinny the soldier's wife was. Her skin was rough and dry like sandpaper, and her dull blond hair was long and stringy. Her small blue eyes were cold and hard, and her thin nose, too large, was rather masculine. Nature had not been generous to Madeleine. What a contrast to the soft and warm countenance of Lizette, her spotless skin, her lively black eyes, her rich black hair, her femininity and her expressive sensitivity.

I intended to tell the Henrys about leaving the farm in Wavreille, about staying at the monastery. But under the circumstances, I didn't. I thought that whatever I would say would only give Madeleine something more to harp about.

Darkness fell with serious intent now. The fire in the oven projected little red spots dancing on the ceiling, the burning wood crackled. I wondered were the children were, but did not ask. I did ask for permission to shave. My mind was made up and all restlessness and fear had left me. If the old train schedule was still in force, a train would leave for Brussels in one hour, and I intended to be on it.

Of course, the train was not on time. I shared the small, familiar waiting room with two German soldiers. Their conversation indicated that they did not have much on their minds. Not much they cared to talk about anyway.

Suddenly, Madame Henry and Lizette appeared. They had come to see the train arrive, hoping that the Colonel would be on it, and they were surprised to find me at the station. I told Madame that I was returning to Brussels. She must have had graver things on her mind, because she didn't ask me anything or show any interest, but satisfied herself by saying, "Oh."

We waited quietly in the dark, kept from being complete by a small oil lamp, until the train came. The Colonel was not on it.

Incredibly, this trip was the smoothest I had taken so far. By midnight I was in Namur, and at 6:30 a.m. at the Brussel' "Luxembourg" station.

Once in my room, thankful that I had not given it up, I lied down for a while but even though I was very tired, I could not sleep. Soon went to buy potatoes and a loaf of bread with what money I had left. Then I put the white flower pot on the window sill in the staircase to the ‘in’ position and spent several hours reviewing notes and scribbles on bits of paper and in a pocket calendar I carried around.

The following morning I saw Andrée, and in the evening I went to the spare room on the seventh floor of "Andrée's" apartment building, where I stayed until the 26th. of June, mostly sleeping, eating a little, reading, cleaning myself and my clothing.

Andrée had made an appointment for me with the parish priest. She had urged me all along to take instructions in Catholicism, not saying it, but obviously believing that my miseries stemmed from not being baptized, not having been saved by the church. I on the other hand was convinced that much of my miseries were caused by people saved by the church, and I had not the slightest intention of embracing a religion that was the motivating force, as well as the alibi for monstrous crimes, of which the persecution of the Jews was really just one.

But, I could ill afford to antagonize Andrée, nor did I want to needlessly distress her. For her I would always do anything I could. Later, if there was a later for me, we might well come to some sort of understanding. Perhaps when freed from the pressures and fears of the war, Andrée's concepts would mellow.

That the parish priest was also Andrée's confessor did little to alleviate her fears about our perdition. On the contrary, I suspect he pressured her for my conversion.

This obese disciple of Christ smelled strongly of liquor when he received me in his one-room apartment. His red face with its veined nose was doubtless from a cartoonist's dream. His black robe could have benefited much from a trip to the cleaner.

He made a speech to me about how the Jews hated Christ, and how they spent their time vilifying the son of God in word and in deed. Then he asked me why this was so.

All I could tell him that this was news to me, that I had never known any of the people he asked me about. At any rate, I decided right there and then that this priest would have an awful time teaching me anything, not to mention converting me.

From his ample bookcase he gave me a book and asked me to return to him for further counsel after I read it. I had already made up my mind not to return, and even Andrée's tears didn't change my determination.

One might have thought that the Germans busy now with the Allied advances in France and Italy, and the Russians in the East, would have to reduce their efforts looking for Jews and other subversives. But this was not to be. Persecuting people was a way of life for them. More and more people were arrested, more and more were executed. The Jewish population had shrunk to insignificance. Yet, the increasing reign of terror was not a deterrent to anti-German activity which also grew in scope.

Sabotage and shooting of collaborators became an almost daily occurrence. Most actions took place at midnight.

A new German propaganda effort was designed to instill fear of the Allies. Posters appeared, showing a train on its way to Siberia with a warning that the Allies made a deal with the Russians to have the Belgians rebuild their country!

Newspapers, reduced to one sheet now, carried gruesome stories about deadly diseases Allied troops brought with them, stories about rape, starvation and the murder of those unlucky ones who fell into Allied hands. But, fortunately, there still was an opportunity to ward off the evils that would come with the Plutocratic Bolshevistic Nigger Jews. All one had to do was to join the sacred German crusade to save Europe!

(I should have mentioned earlier that on the 8th of June, the royal family had been removed to Germany "for its safety".)

On the second of July, there was a raid in my immediate neighborhood. Anne, who apparently had stopped by occasionally while I had been gone, came to see me. Awash in tears, she told me how much she worried about me. She wanted to talk to her father again to persuade him to hide me at their home.

I was sure that her father would not be interested now anymore than before, and after calming Anne I sent her home.

The landlady had seen Anne come and go and took pleasure in telling Andrée about it. There was an unpleasant scene.

To divert Andrée, I talked about seeing a priest again, if she could find one less anti-Semitic than the parish priest. This did much to make her feel better.

Anyway, the one she found for me was a somewhat sympathetic Bishop with whom I did not mind to visit. Even though he told me at our first meeting, I had no chance at all at salvation until I believed with all my heart that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. That leap of faith was to be my first. But once accomplished, once I believed, he would treat me to lunch.

In the meantime, I had written to father Emmanuel, as I had promised. I had made up some story about obligations I had discovered I had towards the occupant, and thusly my plans for a religious life would have to be delayed. To tell him the truth would not have accomplished anything, especially not as long as the mail was censored.

I found out that my landlady had taken on the job of doing house cleaning twice a week for the Thirifays'. It seems she told them she thought I was wanted by the Germans. Fortunately, those good people not only told her to mind her own business, but pointed out to her that should anything happen to me, she, my landlady, would have to answer for it later.

They were also good enough to tell me about it, and thusly took a worry off my mind.

The Allies were making some real headway in France now, and in spite of the worsening situation in Belgium, my friends and I were in better spirits. Never the-less, the constant raids, several in our neighborhood since my return, unnerved me. One was neither safe in the street or at home. My nights were haunted by recurring nightmares.

One of the worst was one in which I would "awake" because of a fierce rapping on my door: "Police. Open up!" I would jump on my table and through the small skylight lift myself onto the roof. The street would be black and empty below. I would crawl on slippery tiles while my door was broken down.

Then I would jump to the roof next door and from there to a terrace. Nazis would yell behind me. From the terrace I would drop to a balcony where I would find an open door that led my flight through someone's bedroom where startled people would jump from their bed and scream. Light would be turned on, but I already reached a staircase. The front door would be locked and I would shake it in vain while steps come closer behind me. I would turn and run into a basement, and there would find a small window open, squeeze through it, and short of breath I would crawl between neat rows of cabbages in a vegetable garden. Now shots would ring out, bullets would whistle, and I would get up and run, realizing that I was naked. Already I would be at the cemetery wall, hoist myself over it and continue my flight between tall white tombstones. There would be more shooting behind me and shadows, and finally, I would not be able to run any more. But just then, I would fall into an open grave and the terror would wake me. The odor as I fell was horrible.

Covered with sweat, heart pounding, I would get up, frantically search my room for a cigarette, even though I knew perfectly well that I didn't have any.

I should mention that I picked up more free-lance work. Allied flags made of bed sheets.

Andrée had been gone for four days to visit her family. Travel was dangerous for everyone now, and I was glad when she came back. I then went to stay in the room on the seventh floor. On the first night there I had my nightmare. I woke, heart pounding and covered with sweat, got up and removed the black-out from the window to open it for some air. It was very warm. The streets were dark and still, or were they? There was a faint hum in the air, the familiar sound of approaching planes.

A few minutes later, all hell broke loose. I had not heard such a fury in a long time. It was also a sight to behold, but the window was a bad place to be because of falling shrapnel. And I, for lack of a better shelter, went back to bed.

When the racket finally subsided, I heard the elevator arriving. There were steps and voices in the hallway: Andrée and her employers. Andrée had troubles finding the right key while I hurriedly covered the bed and threw my clothes under it.

Madame was quite impatient. She wanted a good look at the spectacle before it was all over. The key turned in the lock just as I jumped on the vaulted trunk behind the wardrobe. Fortunately, at that moment the shooting regained in fury, and the barons contented themselves with standing in the doorway rather then approach the window which now crackled threateningly.

Lightening-like red flashes and thunder like explosions rolled through the room and bombers roared overhead, while they stood in the door and chatted.

I was in a most awkward position on one foot with the other one drawn behind me. My hand held to the back edge of the wardrobe and my balance was precarious. In no time my legs ached terribly. If my visitors were to step into the room and walk towards the window they would see me in all of my glorious nakedness. Cursing myself for not having slipped under the bed didn't help. The shooting let up and I expected momentary discovery. But just then the trio by the door was conversing about a neighbor's uncanny ability to burn all her dinners.

It was strange that neither the baron nor the baroness wondered why the window was wide open. Instead, Madame found the open door too drafty and suggested a return to the apartment downstairs. Monsieur agreed, after all it was two a.m., and Andrée had no objections either.

The door was locked just as I fell off the trunk. Some bombs exploded at the same instance and my undignified fall went unnoticed. Sirens shrieked by and streaks of red light danced weirdly through the dark room. I sat on the floor massaging my leg to rid myself of a painful cramp.

Madame de Heel was so pleased with the portrait I had made of Andrée, she commissioned me to make one of herself. It was my first commission and I was so excited about it, I forgot to discuss price. After all, the baroness had promised to frame the painting and hang it in her living room for all to see and to admire. Also, she assured me that she would tell one and all who the artist was. What a boost to my career! Hastily I went downtown to get pastels, because a pastel was what she wanted.

My first client sat three times for her portrait. The sittings took place in her living room, and once she offered me a bowl of leftover soup. But, I knew her well enough by now not to be bothered by her lack of graciousness. What annoyed me, was her insistence that I make her look younger than she was.

The painting was done on the 7th of August. Madam offered me 300 francs which would have bought a half a pound of butter. I told her that I would rather give the painting to her for the sake of friendship, but obviously she did not care for my friendship, for she insisted I take the money.

I went downtown to pay for the pastels. There was enough money left for a small canvas for an other portrait of Andrée which I wanted for myself.

On August the 8th., I called on Mrs. Ullmann to inquire about Colonel Henry and learned of his death.

He had been on one of his errands to Brussels and had not returned to Villers when expected. While he was away, the Germans rebuilt one of the three bridges the partisans had blown up outside of Villers, and those patriots decided to blow another one up right there and then. They had done their work at night, but now they also decided on a change of strategy.

They went to the railway station of the village of Lessive on the 23rd of June at noon, cut the telephone and telegraph wires and place dynamite charges on the nearby bridge. Everything went like clockwork, except the bridge refused to blow up. Just then a train arrived from Rochefort. Everyone was taken off the train, and unattended it was sent on rattling over the bridge. This was supposed to set off the stubborn dynamite. Well, it didn't, and the empty train rolled on at an ever increasing speed. It rushed through Villers sur Lesse, on towards Dinant to crash head-on with a train coming from there. The frightful collision took place at Vignee. There were but a few passengers on the train from Dinant, but the colonel was one of them. His head was pierced by a piece of wood that entered his mouth and came out in the back of his neck. He died in the arms of his wife who had rushed to the scene of the disaster.

The young man, who had taken my place as the Colonel's escort, had both legs fractured, and was taken to a hospital in Namur.

In the confusion, someone lifted 80,000 francs from the Colonel. Money brought by him for the partisans.

Groups of partisans came to the Colonel's funeral at Villers to pay their last respect. The village priest refused to carry out the funeral service, stating that he didn't want to have anything to do with "terrorists". (He was to regret his attitude later.)

(The above told tragedy happened three days after I had left Villers to return to Brussels.)

Emil visited me frequently, and insisted on running errands for me to keep me off the streets. He had been arrested on and off, but fortunately, his papers and his physical condition, he still walked with a cane, had kept him from being taken away. Of course, I refused to have him carry flags for me.

More troops were moving over the main routes through the city. For a while it seemed that just more had been brought in, but soon we realized that these troops were moving not towards France but rather towards Germany.

German soldiers who came through Brussels now no longer sang about their glory and conquering the world. Unshaven, unclean and not proud, they seemed to have forgotten their goose-step. No longer did they march in columns, four abreast, but rather they walked in single files. Some pulled bicycles, doubtlessly stolen, and some dragged other loot. Occasionally one saw a non-com on a horse. Many soldiers had no weapons. Perspiring freely in the merciless sun, they kept their eyes before them on the ground.

Officers stowed themselves on trucks, shamelessly loaded with loot, or hastened away in cars, after cautiously foreseeing these with a red cross painted on a white background on the roof.

Soon, the streets and roads leading East were jammed with Nazis. There was not doubt, we were witnessing a route. Civilians lined the thoroughfares to gleefully watch the most beautiful and exciting parade Brussels had ever seen.

The railway system had broken down, causing chaos at the terminals where more Germans attempted to leave.

There were hardly any streetcars running.

The Gestapo had abandoned its headquarters on the avenue Louise, but was doing business as usual.

From the local radio station came dance music and the most laughable dribble about German victories on land, in the air and on the seas. The same was true of the German controlled press. People, however, preferred to believe the rumors which had the Germans beaten in France, and the Allies near the Belgian border.

Anti-aircraft still shot at Allied planes but lacked ardor.

The exodus of the Nazis continued day and night through Saturday the second of September. Then the flood began to subside.

Now SS troops came through, riding on whatever the army had left behind, making a graceless exit on the city's garbage trucks!

The people who had enjoyed the retreat cleared the streets when the SS randomly shot at them with pistols and hand machine guns. I saw a woman gunned down as she crossed the street. But the super race's last fling could not dampen the incredible excitement that permeated the city.

I lived through these days in a daze, finding it hard to believe that I might well survive the war after all, see the Allies come and perhaps find my family again.

Someone had opened the gates to the prison of St. Gilles. Many of the prisoners got away before the Nazis could stop the escape. The Nazis vented their rage by shooting most of those who had not fled.

Senselessly, the Germans blew up depots and utilities and set fires.

The Palace of Justice was in flames. Black smoke rising from its cupola could be seen for miles.

Partisans emerged from hiding to take pot shots at the Nazis. Rifle and machine-gun fire could be heard during the night. I didn't sleep much that night and don't believe many people did.

Early on the morning of September 3rd., Emil arrived delirious with joy. The English were supposed to be just south of Brussels!

Andrée joined us before long, and because her employers were not at home, we hurried to their place to listen to the radio. The two radio stations in Brussels were vomiting anti-Communist propaganda, and London played dance music. That is they played the same song over and over again:

"Sur le pont d'Avignon on y dance, on y dance...", that was it.

But the latest rumor had the Allies at Hall, less than five miles away.

It seemed incredible but not impossible.

I was told that the Gestapo agents who lived in the apartment under the de Heel's, had left at the crack of dawn for a "vacation at Spa".

We were too keyed-up to stay at the apartment and ran into the street and bought what was to be the last edition of the German magazine "Signal".

Its stories about German victories amused us to no end.

There were no more Germans to be seen!

An appeal to the population, in the form of a leaflet, had been dropped in the streets by a resistance movement. (See page 318 of the original diary.)

"We ask you to remain calm. Those who have not received instructions must stay at home to facilitate our task. Don't listen to false rumors. Your nerves will be tested, remain their master."

We separated. Emil went home to be with his family. Andrée returned to the apartment where she was supposed to be, and I walked about the neighborhood. The familiar streets seemed to have exchanged their drab and miserable appearance for a holiday atmosphere. People radiated the emotions that possessed them. Excitement and joy were there, though they had not broken loose yet! Ah to be free!

As if on a signal, Belgian and Allied flags appeared on houses. (Had I made some of those I saw?)

Countless flowers appeared in windows, adding to the festive mood.

People stood around lost for words as if stunt, staring and smiling at each other and at the multi-colored flags which waved gently in a mild breeze.

Suddenly, rifle fire broke out. Flags were hastily taken down. There were still Germans in the city.

But, there was no doubt that the day of liberation was at hand. Joy and excitement, emotions unknown for years, moved closer to the surface.

People found their tongues. Years of fear seemed to have left them as they stood about in small groups discussing the latest rumors with a long forgotten liveliness. Were the Nazis really gone? Would they fight for the city? Where were the Allies and when would they get here? Were they waiting for the night? Where were the German Tiger Tanks?

A small German boy, dressed in the uniform of the Hitler Youth, came down the street. He was lost and too naive, or too cocky, to be afraid, he asked people for directions to his unit - no less!

I wondered if he was surprised at all the merriment he caused and at being send to the devil?

Nobody seemed to want to go home and wait there as had been suggested by the leaflets earlier that morning.

By evening the streets were crowded with what seemed to be all of humanity. The Tommies were supposed to be at the city's edge, and everyone wanted to see them come in and welcome them.

Angry cannon fire growled in the distance, sending red flashes into the darkening sky. Occasionally there was a rattle of small arms shooting somewhere in the city.

It seemed that partisans were picking fights with German rear-guard units that were holding on to certain strategic places. But, no one thought of leaving the streets. Flags had reappeared on the buildings.

Young people carrying flags marched in joyous groups singing old and new songs of liberty and happiness.

Some civilians, apparently members of underground organizations, identified by white armbands, could be seen in small groups. Armed with antiquated rifles they worked their way through the crowd on some mysterious errands.

Still in a daze, I let myself being moved by the throng. A couple of days ago I had lived in unrelenting fear and agony. Was it all over? Was it true? Was it possible? Strangely, I had never dreamed of this day. I must not have believed that it was going to come for me. Living from day to day, had I just waited for my turn to be captured? Now, suddenly four years and four month of despair were gone. I had to accept a normal life with hopes and a future.

I wanted to shout and cry, like some of the people around me, but my joy stuck silently in my throat and I trembled deep inside as if with fever.

A motorcycle approached. People started yelling "...hurrah here they are, hurrah!!" But is was just another citizen looking for the Allies.

Cannon fire came closer and closer, but no one thought of leaving. We had known worse than cannon fire.

Over the commotion a church bell began to peal, timidly but persistently. Others joined in near and far. People crossed themselves. Some kneeled fumbling with their rosaries and prayed. But, no Tommies.

They were supposed to be in the city, coming on the Boulevard St. Michael, but that seemed to be just another rumor.

Groups of impatient people began to look for Rexists, the Belgian collaborators. Most of them had taken off with the retreating Nazis. Disappointed, the mob vented its anger on the abandoned homes of traitors. These were broken in, contents were thrown into the street. Bond fires were started and hysterical people danced around them, gesticulating crazily and shouting like drunken demons.

A large garage was broken in. I was carried inside by the surging crowd. What was not bolted down was torn away. Some trucks, apparently still unrepaired, were pushed outside. In no time the place had been stripped and emptied while I watched, amazed.

To everyone's surprise white-helmeted police appeared and asked us politely to evacuate the premises and to stop the looting. The very unexpected arrival of the law calmed the crowd considerably.

Hysteria and anger gave way to laughter and jesting as all streamed willingly back into the street. There, arguments arose about who was to take possession of the trucks. But although there was much ado and much shouting, no one seemed to be really serious. It was as if it was understood that this was the proper way to pass the time now and to let off steam.

Jovially, the police had gotten some men together, and before long the trucks had been pushed back into the garage.

By midnight, people began to wonder whether or not the Allies were going to get into the city soon, or wait for daylight. Church bells had ceased their clamor, but intermittent shooting could still be heard.

People seemed to tire, began to go home.

This was my second night of excitement and I wondered about becoming too exhausted to enjoy the arrival of the Allies if they would not show up soon. Also, it had turned cold and I shivered.

Side streets were not crowded. Before long I reached the house that had sheltered me for so many endless weeks.

The landlord and his family were not about, but in the staircase I encountered the woman who lived under me. She was shaking with fear of a pending house to house battle between the Germans and the Allies.

So, instead of getting some sleep, I sat with her over a cup of "coffee", assuring her over and over again that there were not enough Germans left in the city for a serious skirmish, and that she and her child were quite safe. (She had taken her child to her mother, I believe.)

Finally, I went upstairs for some shut-eye. Just then it occurred to me that all the houses on the streets had flags flying, except ours.

I hastily took my only bed sheet, and with the textile paints I had I converted it into a Belgian flag.

God, if anyone in this town had a reason to fly a flag it was I! The "Rexists" next door had their home covered with flags. (I found out that the "Nazis" next door really were members of the underground who had played a dangerous double role. The machine I had sometimes heard at night had been a printing machine!) How I had dreaded them! And how I had detested the German music that had come from next door! Now Allied songs penetrated the walls.

I was inclined to believe their story, because I remembered that they had been quite happy the day the Americans entered Rome... a year ago.

I fastened a broom handle to the flag and opened the window to get some fresh air and to make my flag dry faster. Then I threw myself on my bed to get some rest. But sleep would not come. I seemed to be floating in a void, listening dreamily to my heartbeat and to the "sweet" sounds of fighting which kept on erupting here and there. Occasionally there were explosions. Glow of fires reddened the sky. Reflections danced over the floor and the ceiling of my room.

The woman came running up the stairs hysterically shouting:

"Mr. Henri! Mr. Henri!"

"For heaven's sake what is it now!?"

"The English are here! The English are here!"

"Sure!"

"Well, I am going out to look for them."

"Great! Maybe I will be able to get some sleep now!"

She ran downstairs and I turned over. But what was this? Everything trembled with the echo of some sort or roar in the streets. Could this be it? Could the Allies be here?

As fast as my legs could carry me I ran into the street and towards the happy clamor.

It was 1:30 a.m., September 4th, when I reached the Boulevard St. Michel where enormous tanks thundered slowly by the hilarious crowd. One could hardly see them in the dark, and one could hardly hear the cheering, laughing and the crying over their roar. It was not like reality. It was like a dream.

Could we be sure those were not German? Flowers were thrown at the tanks, at the black men in the turrets. As I watched in speechless amazement, five of these monstrous tanks moved by. These were followed by small, open tanks, brought to a halt by the surging crowd. Women smothered grinning warriors with kisses, men hugged them and shook their hands.

Trying to move on, tanks managed to advance a few feet.

I climbed on the last tank of this group, hoping I could go with them. A man who had been blowing a trumpet, mistook me in the dark for one of his liberators, and shaking my hands vigorously kept saying, "thank you, thank you!" In English. "It's all right," I kept saying to him in French, until he realized that he was not talking to a British soldier and with a gesture of disappointment turned away.

The column of tanks inched its way through the mad mass of humanity. The three men in "my" tank were so busy receiving affections, they had not noticed me. Finally, I surprised the one next to me by tapping him on his shoulder.

He turned his blackened, smiling face to me exposing a row of shining white teeth and sharp but friendly blue eyes. He was a young man in his early twenties. I wished that I could talk to him, tell him how happy I was to see him, how happy I was that the nightmare was over!

I had English in grammar school, all forgotten, and recently had studied some basic phrases in a pocket Berlitz language book.

"Hello," I shouted. "I am very happy to see you!" The Tommy must have understood for he nodded encouragingly.

"You did not come too soon!" I shouted over the din.

"Are the people really happy to see us?" He asked to my surprise.

"Can't you see?" I shouted, "Can't you see?"

We passed a hospital where windows were crowded with waving and cheering patients. White uniformed nurses rushed to the tanks, screaming with delight, showering them with flowers. A large bouquet struck my face. The broad boulevard ahead of us had become covered with flowers, and the tanks thundered slowly over this fragrant carpet.

We turned right on the Chaussee de Louvain, equally dense with a hilarious and cheering throng.

The soldier next to me, whose name was Bob, told me that he and his comrades were of the First Irish Guard. Early in the morning they had left Arras, a city in France, and now they were on their way to Antwerp.

Some shooting could be heard ahead of us. The crowd became thinner. We rolled on more rapidly. One of the enormous tanks at the head of the column opened fire. We came to a stop. Bob did not seem perturbed at all, but he suggested that it would be best for me to get off here. I shook my head and tried to explain, I wanted to come along. I wanted a rifle, I wanted to help.

The tanks rolled on again while I argued with Bob who told me to be patient. He could not permit me to come along, but I might talk to the G.H.Q. officers of their outfit who would be in Brussels by morning. Perhaps they would allow me to join.

Hoping to hear from me again, Bob wrote his name and address on a piece of paper. He also gave me his pocket knife as a souvenir of our strange and happy encounter.

Machine guns clattered ahead of us, bullets whined and we halted again. I hugged Bob, reluctantly climbed off the tank and left.

Later, I notice to my distress, that Bob's name and address, written in the dark on the vibrating tank, was illegible. I would not be able to write or talk to that man again.

Now the streets were deserted. After the rush of humanity, the outburst of joy and excitement, the quiet darkness was strangely heavy. Occasionally, red glows would flash through the black sky and cannon fire would roll over the streets like thunder. Ahead of me, I suddenly heard sounds of merry making, and near the church of St. Joseph I encountered a few English trucks and motorized cannons parked along the edge of the Chaussee. The dismounted crew danced with happily sweating women in the street and in a café, to the sound of an old scratchy record. Gaily laughing couples hung to each other in the golden glow of an imprudently lit petroleum lamp which projected their happy shadows on the cobble stones.

..."It's a long way to Tippereri, it's a long way to go..."

I stopped for a moment and gratefully accepted a cigarette offered by one of the Tommies.

A little further on the Chaussee, an infuriated mob screeched at a house occupied by an alleged collaborator who apparently had missed his chance to escape with the Nazis. Again and again men threw themselves against the door of the building in an effort to break it down, but each time, someone fired a pistol at them from upstairs. The brazen shooter had not hit anyone so far, but neither had he pacified anyone.

This mob was not in need of my help, and as I was beginning to tire, I went on anxious now to get home.

I lit my English cigarette enjoying its strange rich flavor. A few puffs and I was dizzy.

Suddenly, people who had been standing in doorways and windows, probably attracted by the racket at the collaborator's house down the Chaussee, disappeared. Windows and doors were flung shut and bolted.

For a moment I was bewildered, then I heard the even rhythm of nail- studded boots on the pavement. I had forgotten that there were still Germans in the city and here were some of them. They were coming toward me. There was nothing for me to do but to keep on walking in the middle of the street. Paratroopers came in two single files, one on each side of the Chaussee. Each man armed to his teeth pointed his sub-machine gun at me when he saw me. Any unexpected movement, any sudden noise would turn me into a sieve. I was not thinking of being provocative as they walked grimly by, turning their guns after me for a few moments when they finally were past me. I had counted fifty.

Forgetting my fatigue, but not the dancing Tommies, I began to run for help as soon as the night had swallowed the Germans.

I did not get very far before a harsh voice yelled at me to stop, and its owner, a partisan armed almost as thoroughly as the Germans, barred my way.

Gasping for breath, I explained the urgency of my errand. He shrugged, quietly told me that he too had seen the Germans. I felt like asking him why he had not ordered them to halt, but thought the better of it and instead followed him into a house where the Resistance had set up some sort of headquarters. A couple of the men were lecturing a woman who had been stopped in the street without an ID. There was also a drunk who was to be next in line, and I was told to kindly wait my turn.

Sizing up this august assembly, I turned and sprinted away, leaving the threatening shouts quickly behind.

A minute later I reached the Tire National, where earlier, when I had passed the place on the tank, I had seen the shadows of parked tanks. These were still there, and there was also a soldier standing guard at the corner where the Chaussee de Louvain reached the boulevard Auguste Reyers.

In the dark I could not identify his uniform, and for a fleeting moment it occurred to me that he could be German, but then there was something in his bearing that was definitely not.

"Are you Belgian?" I asked him in French for lack of a better idea.

To my surprise, he said that he was.

"Probably with the Americans?" I ventured. Thanking heaven for being right again, I quickly informed him of the German paratroopers I had seen and asked him to take me to his officer.

At this moment, a German car came zooming by. The soldier stepped into the street shouting that he would shoot if the car didn't stop at once, but the car kept going. The soldier, shrugging, turned back to me.

Perhaps attracted by the shouting, an American officer appeared from between the tanks. He listened to my story nodded with interest, then told me that he had not understood one word of what I had said, and had the soldier retell my story in a much better English. I added desperately, that there was not a moment to lose. The Germans were bound to run into the unwary English at any moment. The officer, who kept nodding with sympathy, began to question me about the number of men involved, their uniform and how fast they had been walking. Were they young? Could I estimate their present position?

Then he offered me an American cigarette and told me that his men were very tired and needed their sleep. And, even though they were rolled in their blankets right next to their tanks, it would take at least ten minutes to get rolling. If and when the Germans should meet up with the Tommies, the shooting would be heard and then there would be plenty of time to take action.

Disappointed I went on my way, thinking that these Americans were lucky that the paratroopers had not run into them. They could have made hash of the guard and his sleeping buddies in no time at all.

Anxiously I listened to sporadic shooting, but to my relief none seemed to come from the direction of the Chaussee de Louvain.

The sun was rising on a new day, pushing back the shadows and turning the black sky slowly to a limpid blue. The trees lining the boulevard St. Michel, already touched by the colors of autumn, rustled softly in the cool morning breeze.

I was happy, but it was not the happiness I had witnessed during the night. I had been a spectator rather than a participant. Had not this night more meaning for me than for most of the others who had so heartily celebrated? Perhaps it would have been different if my family had been here. I thought of them as I walked wearily into the new day. The list was long. Would they ever know a morning like this? A day of liberation?

People were pouring into the streets again, their faces aglow with wonder and gladness. They were out searching to behold their liberators. I thought, 'Liberators, thanks for coming, thanks, but you have come too late.'

No sooner was I on my bed when Emil arrived with the news that columns of American tanks were moving over the Boulevard St. Michel from the Avenue de Tervueren. I agreed that this was exciting and marvelous, but also assured him that I could hardly stand up and just had to get some sleep.

"Sleep?!" he shouted, " How can you think of sleep at a time like this? You will be always able to sleep, but this, *mon ami*, you will not see again!"

I could not argue with him. After all, he was right. Reluctantly, I took my camera, which fortunately had film in it, and left with my friend whose boundless enthusiasm told me that he himself had some shut-eye during the past two days.

Endless columns of tanks and trucks, their din and that of the celebrating crowd soon bewitched me into forgetting my fatigue once more.

We roamed the streets and I took some pictures to help fix this moment of delirium in our memory. (See page 329 of original diary.)

On the rue de la Loi, a German tank had been blown up. Bits of flesh lied on the pavement about it.

English trucks came over the rue Royal and the boulevard du Regent.

Over the avenue de Tervueren came the Americans: Tanks, trucks, jeeps, slowed happily by kissing, hugging and cheering crowds.

We had just turned around to go back to my room when the shelling began. Smiling soldiers retreated into the tanks and the crowd dispersed as fast as its legs could. Emil and I also started to run while shells whistled and exploded about us. From all the bombings we had experienced, we knew that the intensity and the length of the whistle were an indication as to where the projectile would impact. It was generally believed that a direct hit could not be heard because the shell would arrive before the sound. Twice the whistle came fast and we threw ourselves into the gutter.

"The Germans are still at Melsbrook," Emil panted as we ran, "Don't worry, they are surrounded!" he added, probably thinking that Germans as near as Melsbrook might scare me. He didn't know that I had decided never to be scared again.

People kept running all around us. I was surprised that no one fell when shells exploded nearby.

At the place de Groof we encountered my landlord's son sprinting towards us. Eyes popping in his round sweat-covered face, he shouted: "Monsieur Henri your room is on fire!"

The three of us ran together now, and as we approached the house we saw billows of smoke rising from my mansard. Stumbling upstairs I realized that the smoke was not caused by fire but rather by dust. Dust also filled the staircase and had covered everything with a thick layer of gray.

Out of breath and coughing we got into my room. It was a shamble.

A canon shell had entered over the window, hit the opposite wall right over the pillow on my bed, where it exploded. There was a gaping hole in the roof and a larger one over my pillow, and everything in the room was peppered with little holes including my bed and the pillow.

If Emil had not come to fetch me, I would have been quite dead.

We waded through the dust to the table. When I impulsively swept it off the table with my hands, a letter from Father Emmanuel fell to my feet. It must have been there for a day or two.

More shells were exploding nearby. Sharp, dry detonations. In the street people were shouting. Apparently someone was hurt.

The boy ran downstairs. Emil and I dusted the chairs off , (I had bought a second one early this year) and sat down to read the letter:

Peace my well loved Henri,

A cordial thanks for your letter of the 5th of this month (August) and for the picture that graces its fourth page.

The account of your conversation with your dear mother upon your return is really interesting. The finding of the famous letter (Notice from the authorities) is not interesting at all. "I know that it will be impossible for me to join you..."

Console yourself, my friend, and be aware that this impossibility will be probably but very temporary. In any event, regardless of what should happen, be not discouraged. It will turn out to be best for you, provided that you conform your will to the will of God. To be fully and to all purposes convinced of this truth, you have only to remember the last meditation of your retreat. To help you do so, I will resume briefly.

Think first of the consoling message announcing to you that God shall regulate the smallest details of your life for your greatest real happiness, and shall not permit any created force to do you the least real harm. That if an apparent wrong is done to you, he himself will arrange things in such a way as to turn it into your greatest blessing, provided that you conform your will to His.

Remember also: 1. Nothing can happen to you without the order or the permission of God, since he is omnipotent, therefor absolute master of all events be they of a natural or a supernatural order.

2. That whatever he may send our way or allow in our regard has as objective our greatest welfare, since in his infinite goodness he wants our welfare incomparably more than we possibly could.

3. That being infinitely wise, he cannot possibly err in his choice of means to attain his end, our happiness. We with our limited intelligence err often. He never. Therefor, when he judges such and such an ordeal necessary for us, it is so, even though it might be an unspeakable tragedy from our human point of view.

Do not forget, however, the one condition: Provided that we conform our will to his. When you are confronted with no matter what difficulty you can always apply the same reasoning, the same spiritual master-key.

1. This did not happen to me without God's order or permission.
2. He has sent it for my own good.
3. He cannot be mistaken, therefor...

If you always act this way you will be the happiest of mortals, for you shall find happiness even in suffering. This is what I wish for you.

Regardless of where providence may lead you, I hope that you will write to me, especially when discouraged.

As Paul said, "Overflow with joy amidst your tribulations. " Following the recommendations to the Philippians: "Rejoice ceaselessly in the Lord! Oremus pro invincem."

The shelling seemed to have ceased. My friend Emil, the atheist, got up, shook his head, shrugged, mumbled something about the philosophy of 19th Century Optimism and waded to the door raising a cloud of dust. He seemed taller and straighter than I had ever seen him before. Turning to me, he said, "It's three o'clock buddy! Don't just sit there! We ought to get something to eat. And, don't forget, we have to find you another place to live."

September 4th. 1944

APPENDIX to H. K. diary

Song of the partisans:

"Ami entends-tu le vol noir des corbeaux sur nos plaines?
Ami entends-tu les cris sourdes du pays qu'on enchaine?
Ohé, partisans, ourvriers et paysans c'est l'alarme.
Ce soir l'ennemie connaitra le prix de sang et des larmes.

Montez de la mine descendez des collines camerades,
Sortez de la paille les fusils, les mitrailles, les grenades,
Ohé, les tireurs à la balle et aux couteaux, tirez vite.
Ohé, saboteur, attention à ton fardeau, dynamite.

C'est nous qui briserons les barreaux des prisons pour nos frères.
La haine à nos trousses at la faim qui nous pousse, la misère.
Il y a des pays où des gens aux creux des lits font des rêves.
Ici, nous, vois-tu, nous on marche, nous on tue, on nous crève.

Ici chaqu'un sait ce qu'il veut ce qu'il fait, quand il passe.
Ami, si tu tombe, un autre sort de l'ombre à ta place.
Demain du sang noir séchera au grand soleil sur nos routes.
Chantez camerades, dans la nuit la liberté vous écoute."

****

Margit was liberated when the Americans reached Rochefort.

We had to wait three more years before we could leave for the United States.

Mrs. Bertha Dirkx died in Brussels in 1954.

Mr. Arthur Theo Dirkx died in Brussels on his birthday in 1967. (Born Sept.11, 1896)

Emil Rausch died in Brussels in 1958 in a motorcycle accident. (Born Dec.18th 1924?)

Andrée Castin (Born 12/25/26) married a childhood friend and lives in Gosselies.

Monique Dirkx-Lefebvre, the Dirkx' only daughter, resides in Brussels, Belgium. Her husband Yves is a commercial artist. They have two daughters, Anne and Sylvie.

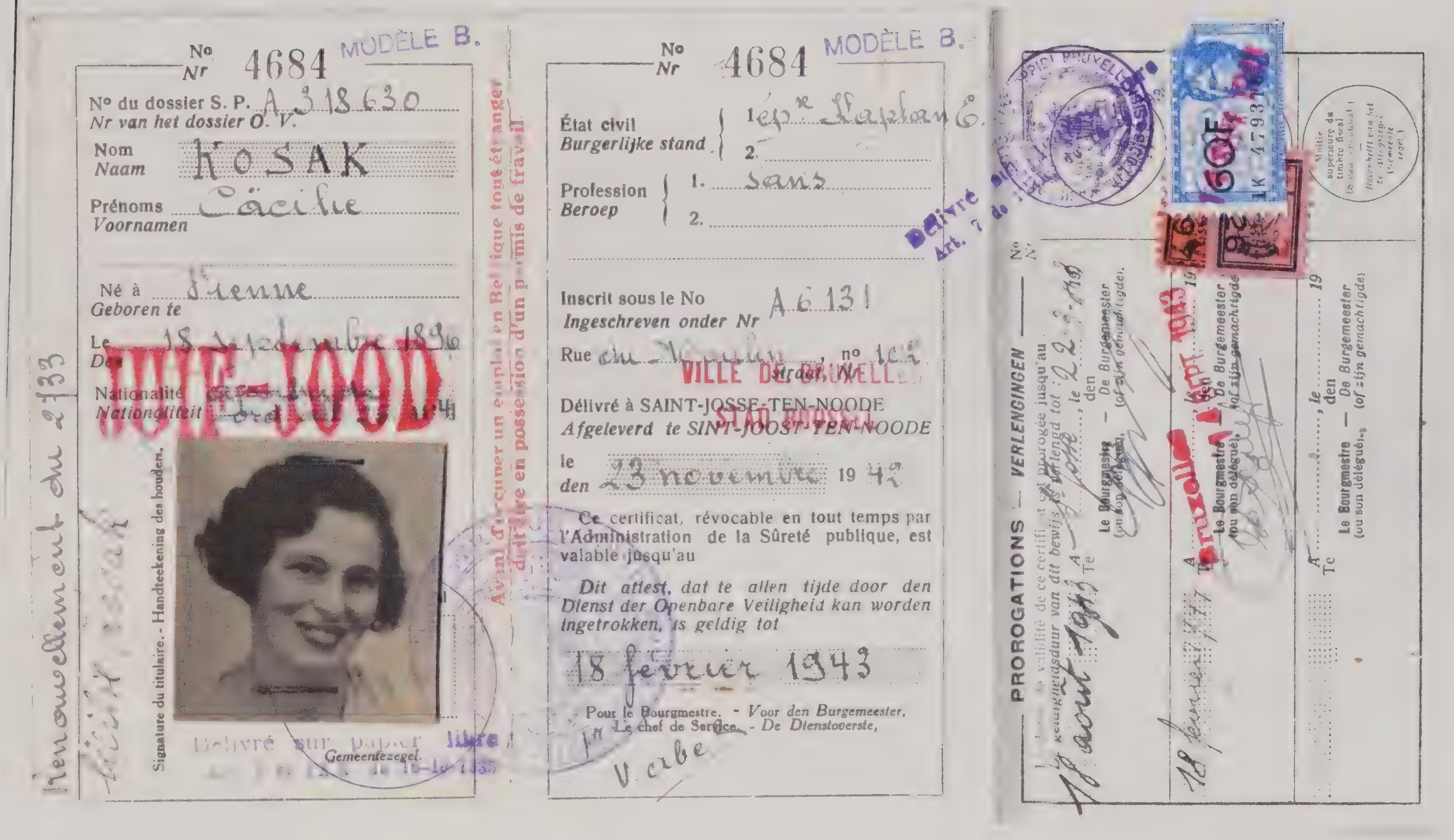
Mrs. Madelaine Henry and children, Roland, Robert and Monique live in Brussels.

In addition to Ernest, uncle Simon Kaplan, his mother Helena and his cousin Lintschi survived the occupation. Helena died shortly after the war. Simon died in Brussels in 1972. Lintschi returned to Vienna and died there in 1985. Leo Heber, her brother, returned to Vienna after the war by way of the Mid-East. He died in Vienna in 1980(?)

Ernest (Kaplan), my cousin, never recovered from the hardships of the war. For a while he worked as a musician. For a number of years he was confined to a mental hospital. He lives in Brussels.

The Van Gucht' daughter, Fabienne, married an American and presumably lives in the United States. I don't know what happened to the others.

Not one of our 43 relatives who were deported to a concentration camp returned.



Renouvellement du 2133

Nº / Nr 4684 MODÈLE B.

Nº du dossier S. P. / Nr van het dossier O. V. A 318 630

Nom / Naam KOSAK

Prénoms / Voornamen Cäcilie

Né à / Geboren te Vienne

Le / Den 18 septembre 1896

Nationalité / Nationaliteit [illegible]

JUIF-JOOD

Signature du titulaire. - Handteekening des houders.

Délivré sur papier libre

Gemeentezegel.

Avant d'occuper un emploi en Belgique tout étranger doit être en possession d'un permis de travail.

Nº / Nr 4684 MODÈLE B.

État civil / Burgerlijke stand 1. épˣ Kaplan 6.
2.

Profession / Beroep 1. sans
2.

Inscrit sous le No / Ingeschreven onder Nr A 6 131

Rue / Straat du Moulin, nº / Nr 16

VILLE DE BRUXELLES
STAD BRUSSEL

Délivré à SAINT-JOSSE-TEN-NOODE
Afgeleverd te SINT-JOOST-TEN-NOODE

le / den 23 novembre 1942

Ce certificat, révocable en tout temps par l'Administration de la Sûreté publique, est valable jusqu'au

Dit attest, dat te allen tijde door den Dienst der Openbare Veiligheid kan worden ingetrokken, is geldig tot

18 février 1943

Pour le Bourgmestre. - Voor den Burgemeester,
Le chef de Service. - De Dienstoverste,

Délivré ... Art. 7 de ...

PROROGATIONS — VERLENGINGEN — Nº / Nr

La validité de ce certificat est prorogée jusqu'au / Geldigheidsduur van dit bewijs is verlengd tot: 18 août 1943 A / Te [illegible], le / den 22-2-43

Le Bourgmestre — De Burgemeester (ou son délégué), (of zijn gemachtigde).

18 février 19.. A / Te Bruxelles, le / den 1 sept 1943

Le Bourgmestre — De Burgemeester (ou son délégué), (of zijn gemachtigde).

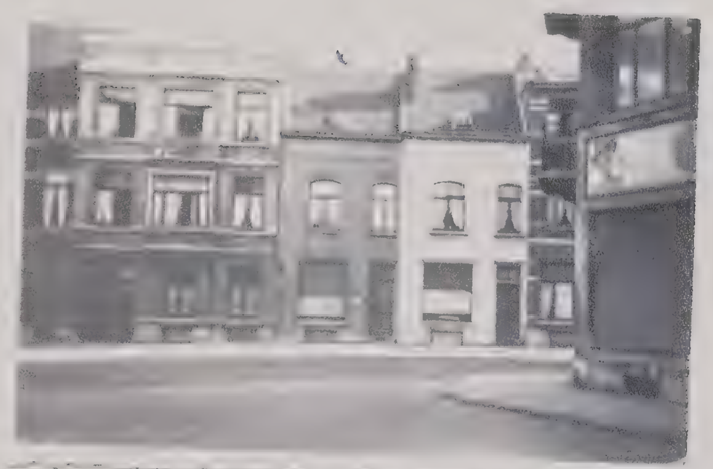
A / Te ...., le / den .... 19...

Le Bourgmestre — De Burgemeester (ou son délégué), (of zijn gemachtigde)

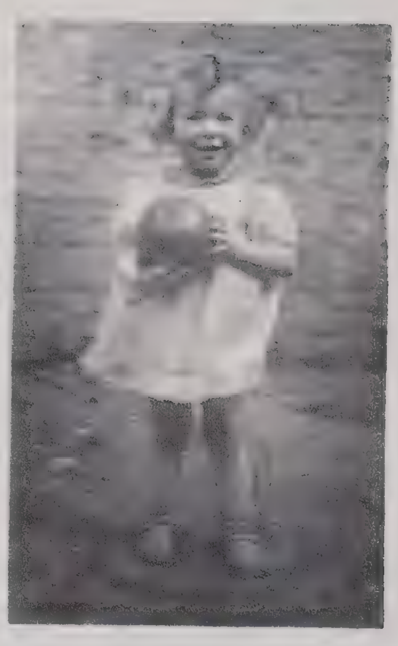
Moitié supérieure du timbre fiscal — Bovenhelft van het te zegel

60F
K 4793

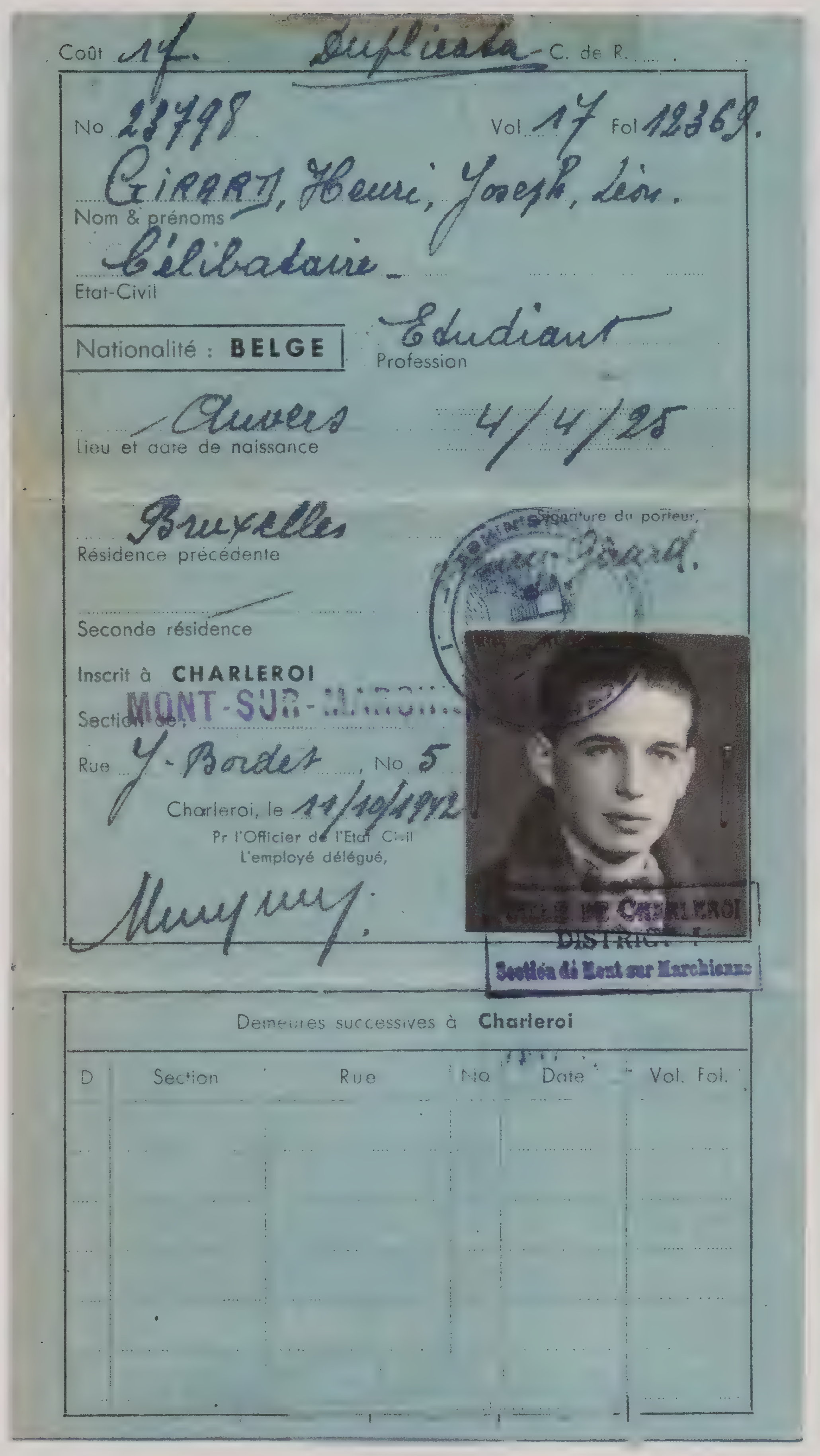
My mother's Jew IDee.



108 rue des Menuisiers



Rita Kaplan



Coût 1f. Duplicata C. de R.

No 23798 Vol. 17 Fol 12369.

GIRARD, Henri, Joseph, Léon.
Nom & prénoms

Célibataire
Etat-Civil

Nationalité : **BELGE**

Etudiant
Profession

Anvers 4/4/25
Lieu et date de naissance

Bruxelles
Résidence précédente

Signature du porteur,
Henri Girard.

Seconde résidence

Inscrit à **CHARLEROI**

Section de: MONT-SUR-MARCHIENNE

Rue Y-Bordet, No 5

Charleroi, le 11/10/1942

Pr l'Officier de l'Etat Civil
L'employé délégué,

VILLE DE CHARLEROI
DISTRICT I
Section de Mont sur Marchienne

Demeures successives à **Charleroi**

D	Section	Rue	No	Date	Vol. Fol.

My first Belgian IDee, received from "aunt" Anna.

ASSOCIATION DES JUIFS EN BELGIQUE COMITÉ LOCAL de BRUXELLES
Fondée en vertu de l'Ordonnance de l'Autorité Occupante du 25/11/1941

JODENVEREENIGING IN BELGIE LOKAALKOMITEIT : BRUSSEL
Opgericht ingev. de Verordening van de Bezettende Overheid van 25/11/1941

SECRÉTARIAT GÉNÉRAL :
18, QUAI DU COMMERCE
ALGEMEEN SEKRETARIAAT :
HANDELSKAAI, 18
TEL. 17.61.29 ◆ C. C. P. 714.07

SECTION ....

No ....

Veuillez mentionner dans votre réponse la Section et le No

1625

BRUXELLES, LE 22 août 1942

Nous certifions par la présente que M;
KASAK, Herman. 129. rue du Moulin
a remis son ordre de prestations de travail No. 0987
à l'A.J.B. pour effectuer les démarches conformes aux instructions reçues par le Sicherheitsdienst.

Wir bestâtigen hiermit, dass wir den Arbeitseinsatzbefehl Nr. 0987 von KASAK, Herman 129. rue du Moulin entgenomen haben um ein Gesuch um Freistellung gemaess der uns erteilten Instruktionnen, beim Sicherheitsdienst einzureichen.

ASSOCIATION DES JUIFS EN BELGIQUE
Fondée en vertu de l'Ordonnance de
l'Autorité Occupante du 25/11/41
COMITE LOCAL DE BRUXELLES

ÉCOLE MOYENNE JUIVE DE BRUXELLES
AGRÉÉE PAR l'A. J. B.
(Ordonnance des Autorités Occupantes du 25-11-41)
SECTION D'ATHÉNÉE
21, RUE SAINT-FRANÇOIS, SAINT-JOSSE

DIRECTION

CERTIFICAT DE FREQUENTATION.

Je soussigné, CH. CYPRING, Dirécteur-Administrateur de l'Ecole Moyenne Juive de Bruxelles, certifie que Monsieur,

KOSAK, Hermann

né à Vienne, le 2.5.1924, domocilié à St.Josse, I02, rue du Moulin, est inscrit à l'Ecole Moyenne Juive de Bruxelles, et qu'il suit les cours de la Section des Beaux-Arts.

Fait à Bruxelles, le 23.7.I942.

LE DIRECTEUR.